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UNDER THE BLACK EAGLE

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BY

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UNDER THE BLACK EAGLE

CHAPTER I.

ALMA.

DARK days were at hand for Moscow; and on this account I was glad when my sister went home to London. The city was seething with intrigue; unrest was everywhere apparent; the workers were being goaded to fury by the harsh repressive measures of General Kasslov, the Governor; and an outbreak was a matter of almost daily anticipation.

Kitty remained until the day before that which came to be known as "Black Wednesday"; and she would not have stayed so long had it not been for my urgent wish that Alma Kasslov should go with her on a visit to our London home.

Her father stopped this, however. I think he knew my motive, and guessed that if he allowed Alma to go, I should be one of the party. Kitty knew all about my feelings for Alma, and so did Madame de Courtennes, Alma's chaperon-companion, who came with her to the station to see my sister off.

While the two girls were talking to Mrs. Bulmer, with whom Kitty was travelling to London, and I was

watching Alma's rather sad but bewitchingly beautiful face, Madame de Courtennes drew me aside.

"Alma is worth looking at, Mr. Enderby. She looks lovely," she said, managing to convey much more than the mere words.

"She always does, madame."

"She would like to be going, too," she said, her eyes full of meaning.

"You think so?"

"Should she not welcome an escape from such a home life? In my country someone would have rescued her long since."

"Russia is not like your beautiful France, madame." She shrugged her shoulders and grimaced. "What do you think they would have done?" I asked.

"Run away with her, of course," she replied, with blunt promptness.

"But at least it takes two to make an elopement."

"Two thousand could not do it if they lacked the courage, monsieur," she retorted. "I thought Englishmen had the courage of their convictions."

"I may have the courage of mine, but ——" I ended with a glance at Alma.

"Can you learn what others think without asking?" she replied, following my glance, and then turned away to take my sister's outstretched hand.

As it happened, my sister had also hinted at this, although she knew I had not yet spoken openly to Alma, and the combined suggestions were not without effect upon me. As the train steamed out of the station, Madame de Courtennes gave me a significant look and plunged into an animated con-

versation with someone else, leaving me alone with Alma.

"You will miss your sister, Mr. Enderby," she said, as we turned to walk to her carriage. "And so indeed shall I."

"I wish you had been going with her," I replied.

She lifted her eyebrows and made a pretty little gesture of the hands. "Is that meant for a compliment?"

"I hope you know what I mean," I answered earnestly.

Her eyes fell, and her look grew grave. "I should like to have gone, but you know why that was impossible."

"Very few things are really impossible when one is absolutely determined to do them. Even that."

She paused a moment, as if uncertain of my meaning. "That is my father's creed, but ——" She shook her head.

"If you would trust to me I would find a way," I said in the same earnest tone.

She started slightly and bit her lip as she stopped and looked round for Madame de Courtennes. "This is not England, Mr. Enderby." Her voice was a little unsteady.

"I wish to heaven it were!" I exclaimed fervently. "Will you let me try to find the way? Alma, I would ——" I stopped in confusion at the sudden change in her. The colour ebbed and she trembled violently.

"Hullo, Alma, alone at the station? How are you, friend Englishman?"

It was Count Kaspar Vosnek, her cousin, and it was

his approach which had so disconcerted her. I hated the fellow, partly on his own account, but more because of his air of proprietorship over Alma, based on the monstrous family arrangement that she was to be his wife.

"I came to see Mr. Enderby's sister off, Kaspar, and I am just going home," she replied, with a note of resentment which pleased me hugely.

"I'll see you to your carriage, then."

"Mr. Enderby is doing that, thank you."

"Good, we'll share the honours between us," he replied, laughing and spreading out his hands, as he turned and walked with us. "I'm glad I chanced on you. I'm off, too, you know. Going to Orel for a week"; and he chatted on lightly, as if convinced we were enjoying his company immensely.

A pressure of the hand and a glance at parting helped to assure me that Alma had not taken offence at my earnest words, and I was happy.

"She's the dearest girl in Moscow!" said Kaspar as the carriage drove off. "And I'm one of the luckiest fellows in Russia. I'm sure you are like the rest of the world and admire her immensely."

"Going to Orel, are you?" I would not discuss Alma with him.

He laid his hand on my shoulder as I was turning to my car. "My dear Englishman, shouldn't we have a word? I'm one of the most tolerant men in the world, but isn't this a little—eh?" and he smiled and tossed up his hands. "It's a family affair, you see, and you know the General's intentions. Don't you think it would have been better for all of

us if you had gone off to your foggy island with your beautiful sister ? "

" You forget that I have large interests here." I was in Moscow in connection with a very important invention in which my father had a big financial stake.

" I forget nothing. But you know what a tartar the General is, and what he will feel about your meeting Alma here alone at the station."

" I did not meet her alone, Count Kaspar."

Up went his eyebrows, shoulders, and hands in exaggerated protest. " Why split hairs, friend Englishman ? He'll be like a madman when he knows. Poor little Alma ! It isn't kind of you. Not a bit of it."

This meant, of course, that he would tell the General ; and he could be trusted to make the worst of it. His interest in the family arrangement was centred in her large fortune, and he did not mean to lose it.

" I must be off," I said, and turned toward my car, ignoring his remark.

Just then a friend of mine, Loris Gortoff, passed and greeted me. Kaspar whistled significantly. " That's a dangerous man to know, friend Englishman."

" Have you any other orders for me to-day ? " I laughed.

He echoed the laugh gaily. " It's nothing to me, of course, and I should perhaps beg your pardon. But he is one of the leaders of the Young Russia Party here and suspected of very strong Terrorist leanings. You are a foreigner and in one sense our

guest. I was merely warning you. We live in very troubled times, you know."

"I am no Terrorist, I assure you. Gortoff saved my life once when I was sailing on the river. I upset the boat and was entangled in the sails, and he was rowing by and plunged in and cut me free at the risk of his own life."

"Well, take care he doesn't entangle you in another way. If trouble comes, his friends will be marked men; and my uncle may be trusted to see that they won't have exactly a pleasant time of it."

Here was another tit-bit for him to carry to the General; and I knew how the latter would welcome an excuse for venting his hatred of me in ill-treatment. He had already tried to drive me out of the city, and only the interest which my father had been able to influence had stopped him.

A bigger tyrant than Alma's father never drew breath, and his oppression of the unfortunate people in his power was notorious over the whole Empire. But he kept them down. His iron hand was felt everywhere; his argus eyes missed nothing, and retribution, swift, cruel, and terrible, followed the least sign or suspicion of any outbreak. And that was what St. Petersburgh needed.

In his home he was as ruthless as in the city. There was one law for all—his word. He made his decisions almost at haphazard; but once made they were never altered, let the consequences be what they might.

And to add to the gloom of the house for Alma, he hated her. She was his only child, and it was said that he had wished to have a son, and had

vented his disappointment upon her. But there was another reason which I believe had much more to do with it—her mother had died in childbirth, and her fortune, which he considered should have been his, had gone to Alma.

I thought over the matter all that evening, and the morning brought me a letter from Madame de Courtennes:

> "Have you thought of what I said to you to-day? You will see little of Alma unless you have the 'convictions' you spoke of and act upon them, taking your courage in both hands. There has been another of the usual scenes here to-day. Alma is prostrate. Ah, poor Alma! How she needs a strong friend! Has she such a one in Moscow? Can you answer that? Courage, my dear friend. COURAGE! You will win. I tell you this. I, who know Alma's heart and am the daily witness of her misery."

As may be imagined, the letter set me on fire. I set to work at once to think out the means by which we could leave the country, if Alma would once consent to go.

There was another obstacle in addition to her father's opposition. The fortune Alma had inherited from her mother included some lands held from the Crown on an old form of tenure which rendered it necessary for her to obtain the Imperial consent to her marriage, and the penalty of disobedience was heavy. It might entail the forfeiture of her fortune, the loss of nationality, and possibly even imprisonment.

I cared nothing for her fortune; for my father was a very wealthy man, and I myself had a good deal more money than I knew how to spend. And as for the rest, if Alma really cared enough for me to marry me, she would be willing to risk the loss of her citizenship.

But everything would have to be done with the closest secrecy. Moscow was a very long way from the frontier; and if we were to get away we must have at least twenty-four hours before the flight was discovered, or we should be in danger of finding ourselves stopped on the frontier. Russian law would be very hard on a fugitive ward of the Emperor as well as on anyone who helped her to fly.

During the afternoon I was planning the best route to the frontier when my friend Gortoft dropped in to ask me to sup with him that evening at the Russie, a restaurant where we had had many a pleasant meeting.

"Going to leave us, after all?" he asked, glancing at the time tables and map.

"Feel a bit restless after my sister's departure," I replied casually. "Besides, I've about finished what I came to do."

"You employ a lot of workers, don't you?"

"Only a few in the city, but there are more in Perova."

"Perova is all but here, isn't it? A suburb, so to speak."

Something in his manner struck me. "What do you mean by that?"

"Never had any labour trouble with them, have

you? What would you do in case of a strike, for instance?"

"Shut up the place and wait till it blew over, I suppose. But they're not likely to strike. Things are easy enough with them, and we could probably get ten times the number we need any day."

"My dear fellow, I'm not reflecting on your methods. But things happen, you know, and men stand together in such matters. After all, that's only natural, isn't it? Well, see you at the Russie to-night"; and away he went.

The news made me think. Gortoff had certainly intended it as a warning; and he knew a great deal more from his friends than he had told me. The thing furnished another reason why Alma should leave the city. If troubles broke out, I knew the drastic steps her father would take, and the consequent fury of the populace might place her in almost as much danger as the stern old man himself.

The prospect of Alma being exposed to the fury of mob violence filled me with alarm. The fearful orgies of rioting and bloodshed which had followed the Terrorist rising in other towns had startled all Europe, and I shuddered at the thought that such horrors might be perpetrated in Moscow and possibly directed against the woman I loved.

I could not get the thought out of my head all that afternoon until it was driven out by a most unexpected and delightful happening. A messenger brought me a letter from Alma herself.

"Can you come and see me immediately?

"ALMA KASSLOV."

Would a devotee kneel at the shrine of his patron saint? Would a courtier fly to obey the command of his Emperor? I pressed the letter to my lips—smile, if you will, but I did it—and in a minute I was hurrying to answer it in person.

I carried high hopes and pleasant anticipations with me, and indulged in all sorts of vague imaginings as to the cause of the letter. Castles shot up in the air at the promptings of my heart's desires, fashioned with all the exuberance of a lover's hopes and ornamented with all the scrolls of sweet delight inspired by my yearning impulses to serve her and a fond belief that the opportunity had arrived.

Madame's letter had warned me that Alma was in trouble, and now she herself had sent for me. Could any man have a firmer foundation for hope or more kindling inspiration to resolve?

That was the dream, as I sped along, marvelling that the authorities of the city tolerated such drones of horses as the pair which were straining at top speed under the whip and voice of my droschky driver.

And then followed—the reality.

I was expected; and the moment I arrived, old Ivan, the porter, beckoned one of the men to lead me at once to Alma's own suite of rooms.

Usually he spoke freely to me; he had a keen appreciation of my tips; and I was impressed by his silence. Could Alma's urgent summons have been caused by her father's illness? Was he worse? Could he be dead? I put a question to Ivan.

He looked at me, as if he would have liked to say something, but only replied: "I can only obey my orders, sir."

I followed the servant up the staircase, feeling very much perplexed by this and less confident than before. The man opened the door of the first room of the suite and stood aside for me to enter.

To my profound astonishment the General was with Alma, and a glance at her face showed me there had been a serious quarrel. He was in a towering rage. He looked weak and pale as the result of his illness, and his hand trembled violently as he held it out threateningly at me the moment I entered.

"You dog, you thief, you scoundrel!" he burst out, in accents of passion. "Did you dare to meet this girl yesterday?"

Taken aback by his vehement abuse, I hesitated in sheer astonishment.

"Father!" cried Alma. But he turned on her and ordered her to be silent.

"I don't know why your Excellency should speak to me like this," I protested.

"Don't you dare to lie to me, you presumptuous young scoundrel! Answer me."

"Mademoiselle Kasslov was good enough to see my sister off, and I had the honour of escorting her to her carriage. That is all."

"It isn't all, you lying young rascal! You arranged to meet again to-day to drive her to Perova. Do you deny it?"

It was true, but my sister's departure had stopped us. "Before my sister, who is your daughter's friend ——"

"Enough," he broke in. "I'll hear no more about your drab of a sister ——"

This was intolerable. "Your Excellency, I refuse to allow you or anyone to ——"

"Or to have any more of your low, cunning English tricks!" he cried, shouting down my protest. "I warn you, if you ever dare to speak to this girl again, I'll have you flogged. I rule in this city, and I rule in my own house. Get out of it, before I have you flung out like the lowborn upstart you are!"

"Go on those terms I will not," I said hotly.

"Mr. Enderby, go, please!" exclaimed Alma.

"Do you dare to speak to that baseborn rascal before me?" cried the furious old man, turning on her.

She drew herself up and met his fierce gaze firmly. "You have no right to insult Mr. Enderby in this way, father. I am sorry for this," she began, addressing me, when in a paroxysm of fury he roared at her to hold her tongue.

"Go, please!" she pleaded. "My father is ill, or ——"

"Ill, am I?" and, as if this filled the cup of his fury to overflowing, he pushed her away violently and faced me. "I'm not too ill to deal with such a rascal as this fellow."

I thought he was going to strike me, and so did Alma. She put herself in his path, and then the crisis came. Carried away by his passion he raised his hand to strike her. I stepped forward and caught it.

"I will go," I said quietly.

"No. Wait now!" he cried. "Get out of my sight, you hussy!" he hissed to Alma.

"I will go," I repeated to her, releasing his hand and moving to the door.

But he put himself before me and blocked the way.

Alma gave me a look of distress which went straight to my heart, and left the room by a middle door.

"Now one word for you. To-morrow that girl will become the wife of her cousin, Count Kaspar Vosnek; and you—mark this well—you leave Russia to-night. If I find you here to-morrow, my police shall have orders to imprison you as a suspect. I have the evidence and the power to break you, and, by God, I will."

"Your Excellency will find that I have friends who will know how to protect me alike from your violence and your insults," I replied, and turned on my heel.

The instant I was across the threshold he slammed the door violently behind me, and I left the house, carrying a heavy heart and bitter load of disappointment with me. I was overwhelmed by the dramatic suddenness of the trouble.

And the last thought in my mind was that this was but a summer zephyr compared with the cyclone which was to burst upon us all before that black day came to a close.

CHAPTER II.

THE ASSASSINATION.

I PASSED some very gloomy hours after the General's outrageous treatment of me, and the only scrap of consolation I had was that he could not drive me out of the city. He had tried that once before and had failed.

I had an old 'Varsity friend, Alec Peterson, on the staff of the British Consulate, and I set him to work at once to do what was necessary to checkmate any move of the sort.

But this would not prevent the old tyrant from forcing Alma to marry Count Kaspar. The only chance in that direction was to try and induce her to leave the country at once; and as I could reckon on Madame de Courtennes' help, I tried to communicate with her. But the attempt failed; and it was largely the desire to seek distraction from my despair that induced me to keep my appointment to sup with Gortoff at the Russie.

It was very late when I started—a wild, pitch-dark, stormy night—and on rounding a corner I blundered into a man hurrying in the opposite direction. His hat fell off in the encounter and

I picked it up and handed it to him with an apology, when he snatched it from me with an oath and darted away.

He was holding a handkerchief to his face; but I got a glimpse of his features and, to my astonishment, I recognised him. It was Count Kaspar. He was wearing a long cloak—a very different garb from his usual dandified dress; and he had obviously wished to escape recognition.

The incident mystified me. Why should he be disguised? Why hurrying from the direction of the General's instead of toward it? When had he returned from Orel? Had the marriage taken place, or had Alma been brave enough to refuse? I was utterly baffled.

I found Gortoff in no mood to listen to the story of my troubles. He was in a condition of intense excitement and could talk of nothing but political affairs in which in my present temper I took no interest whatever. I had indeed always been scrupulously careful not to take any part whatever in them.

I tried to stop him now; but it was useless. "This will be a great night for Russia, Enderby; and you should be one of us."

"I would much rather you did not tell me anything."

"Yet you sympathise with us. You must. You are English; and you must rejoice with us that the hour of our liberty is about to strike. I have told you of the man of mystery, Antonin Gregov; the man who works behind an impenetrable veil of secrecy unknown to us personally, yet knowing us

all; whose eyes and ears are over all Russia; who will come himself at the appointed moment to sweep us to the victory which means the freedom of the people and the reign of justice."

I had indeed heard a great deal of this mysterious Antonin Gregov. The whole party of reform, Young Russia, were looking to him with admiration akin to worship, prepared to render him that implicit obedience which they refused so sturdily to their Government. But I would not be drawn into the vortex of intrigue; so I made no reply except to beg him to tell me no more.

He paid no heed, however, and continued in the same vein until he was interrupted by a burst of cheering at the other end of the garden, where I saw a young man whose thin long face was deathly pale speaking to a group of men and women.

Gortoff rose and pointed to him excitedly. "You see that man. Mark him well, Enderby. That is Andreas Eskatoff."

A woman rushed across to our table and drawing Gortoff aside whispered to him eagerly and with almost fierce delight.

He doffed his hat. "God be thanked!" he exclaimed tensely.

"What is it?" I asked.

"The best," he replied, his voice vibrating with excitement. "The tyrant, Kasslov is dead!"

I sprang to my feet. "Do you mean that Eskatoff ——."

Our eyes met, and there was no need to finish the sentence. "You had better go home, Enderby; at any rate better not be found here with us."

Then Eskatoff began to make his way toward us; and again I met Gortoff's eyes. "I told you he was a hero," he said.

I had no wish to take the hand of that sort of hero, and was turning away when there came a cry of "The Police! The Police!" and in a moment the gardens were plunged in darkness.

I was blundering among the tables when my arm was gripped and Gortoff's voice whispered "This way." He had a companion and by them I was led out of the place. "I have forgotten my money, Enderby, can you lend me some until to-morrow? As much as you can spare."

I handed him a bunch of notes; and directly afterwards he told me I was safe and which direction to take. I hesitated in the dark and heard him say to his companion. "Take these notes, Eskatoff. You know the arrangements for your escape. Don't lose a second."

It was to help the assassin's escape that my money had been needed! As the notes might possibly be traced to me, I realised what a fool I had been to get mixed up in the affair.

But the thought of Alma's plight at such a moment if the news was true, soon chased everything else from my mind and I hurried straight to her house.

It was true. The big house was in the possession of the police; and I was refused admittance until Madame de Courtennes came to vouch for me. "Alma is prostrated by the shock and told me to send for you. I was just doing so when I heard you were here. She will see you as soon as possible. There

must be someone to arrange matters. Everything is chaos."

The whole household was in an uproar, indeed. Many of the servants had been arrested; the police appeared to have gone half crazy in their excitement; and the only person who had kept his head was the doctor, a man I knew well, named Busch.

"It's murder, of course," he said. "They've got him this time. Come up with me and see for yourself."

Murder it certainly was, or assassination rather. A dagger had been thrust deep into the heart and on it was a tag with the words:

"By order of the Terrorists."

But this was not all. The assassin had apparently been carried away by a positive frenzy of rage. The dead General was dressed in his uniform and a dozen rents and slits shewed where the knife had been driven again and again into the body. The epaulettes had been hacked off, and the orders and ribbons sliced away; but, most revolting of all, the face had been slashed and battered and mutilated almost out of recognition.

I gazed at the dead, sick with the horror and disgust of the deed; and then with a shudder I remembered that I had found the money for the escape of the human fiend whose work it was. Desperately perplexed whether I ought to tell the police what I knew, I was leaving the room, the doctor having gone on ahead, when a small glittering object lying close to the skirting caught my eye. To my surprise it was a hypodermic syringe and I slipped it into my pocket, intending to give it to

the doctor later, and hurried downstairs to learn such facts as had been discovered.

A servant was waiting with a message that Alma would like to see me. She was very white and shaken, but calmer than I had anticipated, and Madame de Courtennes whispered that she had begun to pick up from the moment she knew I was in the house.

"Is it not terrible?" she asked wistfully, as she laid her trembling hand in mine. "I thought the shock would have killed me. You know that I was the first to discover it. Oh, that sight!" and she shuddered violently.

"Don't speak of it, Alma," said madame.

"But I wish to tell Mr. Enderby. My father and I had another terrible quarrel this evening. I refused to marry Kaspar and—oh, he was so violent! He—he struck me and ——" She shuddered again, and covered her face in her hands.

"He was like a madman," added madame. "He swore to Alma that the marriage should take place to-morrow and that, ill as he was, he would go out there and then and see that you were sent out of the country. Oh, he was mad!" and she gestured vehemently.

"And did he go out?" I asked.

"He was too ill. He cannot have gone," answered Alma. "He sent for his valet, Eikov, and must have dressed, because he was in his uniform when ——".

"I know," I nodded. "Try not to think of it."

"I was frightened for him because of what Dr. Busch had told me about his heart—that any great

excitement might prove fatal—and I waited up and went several times to his door to listen. Fedora, my maid, saw me there twice and urged me to go to bed. I was almost beside myself. But I must have slept, because it was much later when Fedora came and told me his door was open. I went there at once and saw—oh, I shall never get the sight out of my eyes! I screamed and do not know anything more."

"Alma's scream roused me and I found her lying unconscious in the corridor at the head of the staircase," said madame.

"You had heard no noise in your father's room?" I asked after a pause.

"I had heard him moving about. At least I thought it was my father, but now—I don't know. It may have been—the others." The horror of the remembrance returned and she began to tremble so violently that Madame de Courtennes snatched up a green cut glass scent bottle from Alma's bureau, shook some of the contents on to a handkerchief and handed it to me. I was sitting by the head of the couch on which Alma lay.

"Give her this eau-de-Cologne, monsieur," she said.

I took it from her and then nearly cried out in my amazement. I knew a great deal about drugs and I knew this.

It was prussic acid!

I tried to conceal my consternation. "This is not eau-de-Cologne, I think," I said, retaining the handkerchief and getting possession of the bottle.

Madame de Courtennes looked very confused. "Perhaps I have taken the wrong bottle," she

stammered and took up the companion. "This must be the one."

"I will get this other filled; it is nearly empty." It was, but it contained enough poison to have killed half a dozen people; and I slipped it and the handkerchief into my pocket.

As I did so, my fingers came in contact with the hypodermic syringe I had picked up in the murdered man's room. I turned cold with dismay at the thoughts which flashed through my head; but madame was so occupied in attending to Alma that neither of them noticed my agitation.

When Alma had recovered from the passing faintness, I heard some more of the details. The valet, Eikov, who had been the last to see his master alive, had disappeared and a large sum of money and a quantity of jewels were missing.

This pointed to him as the murderer, with robbery as the motive; but the police theory was that it was Terrorist work and that Eikov, knowing he would be suspected, had taken fright, stolen everything he could lay his hands on and bolted.

My own knowledge enabled me to see some light then. Eikov was clearly a confederate and had admitted Eskatoff to the house and let him out of it after the murder. But I kept all these thoughts from the others.

As Alma was obviously feeling the strain severely, I urged her to go to bed, and madame agreed to remain with her for the rest of the night.

"Try to sleep," I said as we shook hands. "It is sleep more than anything else you need."

"And what will you do?" she asked, wistfully.

"You would like me to remain in the house?"

"I think I can sleep if I know you are here."

"Of course I will stay; but mind, it is a condition that you sleep."

A warm pressure of the hand and a trustful smile rewarded me, and when they had gone, I lit a cigar and sat down to think things over.

I had not been long alone, however, when madame returned.

"I wish to ask you a question, monsieur. You know that I suffer much from sleeplessness and use a narcotic at times. Do you think that a slight injection of morphia would be good for Alma? She is so restless."

I looked at her keenly. She was smiling with all her customary frankness. "On no account, madam," I said decidedly. "In her excited state it would probably do more harm than good."

"I thought I would ask you. I have everything and I know how I am soothed by it at times. But I will do nothing against your advice."

"Mademoiselle Kasslov has never done such a thing, has she?"

She smiled again. "Oh no. She knows my weakness, of course, and that I have the things, She has seen me use the syringe. But she—oh no, never."

"Another reason for not doing it now," I said, and with that she went away, leaving me more perplexed than ever.

How had that prussic acid got into Alma's possession? That she was as pure as light, I knew; but thank heaven it was I who had made the dis-

covery of it. I knew that the bureau from which it had been taken was her own; and that as a rule she kept it locked. She had locked it now before leaving the room. Could it be possible that in the misery caused by her father's systematic cruelty she had ever contemplated the terrible thought of putting an end to her own life?

I scouted the idea. Yet there were the means. And there was the statement of Madame de Courtennes—that Alma knew of her possession of a needle syringe and had seen her use it.

And what of madame herself? I was no judge of things if they had not both been absolutely ignorant of the nature of the contents of that green scent bottle. Any other thought was impossible.

The inference was obvious. Someone in the household had put that poison where madame had found it; had done it secretly and with some purpose. Was that purpose the wish to throw suspicion upon Alma or upon madame? Or was it with the abominable intention that it might be used inadvertently by one or other of them? Could there be another murder plot in the house. If so, who was the plotter?

Alma would not be safe for an hour if my latter surmise were correct.

Immersed in the fearsome speculations which these thoughts started, and in considering what steps I could take to secure Alma's safety, the time passed rapidly until Dr. Busch came into the room and announced that he had finished his work for the present.

"You've been quick, doctor," I said.

"Or you have been asleep," he retorted, with a smile. "It's nearly four o'clock. But I wanted to see you before I left."

"What is it? You look very serious."

"I am going home to bed—and to think. Look here, Mr. Enderby, in what relation do you stand to the dead man's daughter? Madame de Courtennes told me you were going to look after her in this terrible affair."

"Yes. That's so. Why?"

He clasped his hands behind him and walked once or twice up and down the room, his face heavy with thought. Suddenly he stopped in front of me. "You want to get at the truth of it all, I suppose?"

"Isn't the truth pretty clear?"

A short laugh broke from him. "No, it isn't. It's all the most infernal tangle possible. How do you suppose that man was killed? But there, you can't suppose. You don't know anything yet."

"A dagger thrust through the heart like that up there tells its own tale, I should think."

He gave an impatient lift of the shoulders. "Tells its own lies, rather. I've told no one as yet; but, of course, to-morrow I shall have to make my official report. I tell you now, so that if you find it necessary—mark what I say—if you find it necessary in the interests of anyone in the house, you may have some hours in which to do something. That dagger thrust was given *after* the man was dead."

"*What?*" I cried, in profound astonishment. "But the blood from the wound and on the clothes?"

"Yes. That's what puzzled me at first. But what I tell you now is the fact. General Kasslov was

poisoned. I have one or two laboratory tests to make. But I'm certain. He killed himself, I believe. He dreaded the weakness of age which he felt coming on; he had hinted of that to me. But whether it was his own hand, or another's, he died of poison—prussic acid, administered by means of a hypodermic syringe."

I was speechless in consternation; and before I could pull myself together, he bade me good-night and promised to tell me all the results of the tests on the morrow.

I sat on, amazed by the doctor's statement, and a prey to a thousand fear-filled thoughts which it started.

Stealthily, and like one in dread of some felt but unseen terror, I drew out the hypodermic syringe I had found in the General's room and examined it closely.

There was a slight stain of blood on the sharp point, and it had been charged with prussic acid!

If the doctor was right, I held in my hand the instrument of murder, and I had found the poison itself in Alma's possession!

CHAPTER III.

THE GENERAL'S DIARY.

If General Kasslov had really been poisoned it was clear that I might find myself in a very serious position. The evidence in my possession would be of the most critical importance, and to suppress it might prove very dangerous.

Disclose it, however, I dared not. If poison were known to have been in Alma's possession, her arrest would follow as surely as night follows day the instant the doctor's official report was made. The relations between her and her father would be accepted as sufficient motive; the quarrels between them about her marriage would be read as confirmation, and I had heard enough of police methods to be convinced that evidence would soon be forthcoming to secure a conviction in accordance with any police theory.

I went to my bedroom desperately perplexed by this fresh complication, and resolved that my first act on the morrow should be to destroy the evidence which had come into my hands. Sleep was out of the question, and I was pacing the floor when I heard a movement in the corridor. Instinctively I switched off the light and listened.

My hearing is very quick, and I caught the soft rustle of a skirt against my door as someone passed. I opened my door noiselessly and peered out. There was a light in the room I had left. Kicking off my boots, I crept along the corridor and saw a woman, wearing a black hooded cloak, in the act of opening the bureau which I had seen Alma lock.

She searched with feverish, nervous haste for something which she could not find. In seeming dismay at the failure, she glanced round the room, and I saw her features. It was Alma's maid, Fedora Douroff. In another moment I was back in my room, satisfied that I had gained an important clue to that part of the problem which had so perplexed me.

That the woman had gone in search of the poison, I was convinced; and the obvious inference was that she was in some way connected with the tragedy of that night.

In the morning, when I rose, I found a couple of police in Alma's room, and Fedora with them. One of them, whose name was Grovski, I knew well.

"Making a search?" I asked, as we shook hands. "I'm sure Mademoiselle Kasslov will gladly do all in her power to assist you. I am looking after certain matters for her."

"I was told that you were in the house, Mr. Enderby," he replied. "Of course, this search is purely formal, although our orders are to make it. We know the assassin is not in the house, but these things have to be done."

"This is my mistress's bureau," put in Fedora, quite unnecessarily, and it struck me that she was

desirous of standing well with the police. Significant, in view of what I had witnessed during the night.

Grovski was a courteous fellow. "It is probable mademoiselle may not care to have her private papers disturbed until she is present," he said to me.

"I think she would rather get it over," I replied, and sent Fedora for the key. She was soon back, and a very perfunctory search was made. As soon as it was finished, I explained to Grovski the reasons for my presence in the house, and asked him about the General's body servant, Eikov.

"His part is not at all important, except so far as the robbery is concerned," was his view. "It is Terrorist work, and I don't believe that Eikov was even in collusion with them. He came to his Excellency with an irreproachable character, and was one of the gentlest of men. He was in a panic, no doubt, lest he should be suspected, and seeing a large sum of money ready to hand, yielded to the sudden temptation and bolted with it. A man might well lose his head at such a time."

"A very probable solution," I agreed. "Of course, Mademoiselle Kasslov will give you every help in her power, and, in return, we should like to be kept posted about any fresh discoveries. By the way, has Dr. Busch made his report yet?"

"Don't you know about him, poor fellow?"

"Know what?" I asked, with a twinge of uneasiness.

"He is dead, Mr. Enderby."

"Dead!" I cried, in amazement.

"He was on his way home from here, and there was an affray between some of our men and those

whom they were arresting; some shots were fired and he was killed on the spot."

Overwhelmed by the vital significance of the news, I could only stare at Grovski in speechless astonishment. It meant that in all the Empire I alone knew the true cause of the General's death.

"I did not know that he was a friend of yours, or I wouldn't have blurted out the news like this," said Grovski, after a pause, seeing my concern.

"I have known him almost as long as I have been in Moscow," I replied, grasping readily at the suggested reason for my agitation.

"Seems like Fate almost. You know, he was going to retire after this case? He had all arrangements made to go to South America as soon as his Excellency's health permitted."

"Poor Busch!" I exclaimed with a sigh. "A tragic finish to his work here, however. He made the *post mortem* last night. He told me."

"And very unfortunately, as it turns out. He carved the body about in such a way that no other doctor will be able to say much more than that his Excellency is dead."

"Did he not make his report, then?"

"Not a word of it. He may have made some notes, but in the struggle after his death his body was trampled on and tossed about a good deal, and when it was recovered nothing of the sort was found on it."

"Poor fellow!" I exclaimed with a sigh of concern intended to hide my satisfaction at the news. "But he ought to have had some other doctors at the *post mortem*, surely."

"He was wrong there, of course. But he knew

his work; I would rather have his opinion than that of twenty others. The consequences might have been serious, however, if the case were not so plain." And with that, Grovski went off.

I was indeed the only soul in the world who knew the truth, and the sooner the evidences in my possession were destroyed, the better. But when Fedora returned to say that my breakfast was ready, I remembered, with a chill of dismay, that the secret might be shared with her. I would have given a great deal to learn all that she knew; but I dared not run the risk of questioning her.

I had just finished my breakfast when Madame de Courtennes came in with news of Alma. She had slept a little during the night and was in better tone in consequence; and she wished to see me a little later.

"That will just suit me. I have to go to my office," I replied. "But you, madame, you look wearied." She looked indeed haggard, worried, and ill.

She gestured despairingly. "I am in sore trouble. I have been racked with neuralgia and have not closed my eyes all night. I have lost the needle I use for my morphia. I would have given a thousand roubles for it in the night."

I did not let her see the effect of this news upon me, and when she asked me to buy her one, I led her on to describe that which she had lost.

The description fitted exactly the syringe I had found!

I read this as a further proof of the treacherous attempt to fasten suspicion upon Alma or Madame de Courtennes. Whoever was engaged in the slimy task was obviously able to obtain ready access to

their rooms; and this pointed clearly to one person —the maid, Fedora.

I had taken a powerful dislike to the girl, and both my sister and I had been surprised that Alma should place any confidence in her. She was ugly with a repellent sort of ugliness. A long thin face, with cunning stamped on every feature, and close-set black eyes instinct with infinite slyness. A born spy, with stealthy, catlike movements; a very dangerous woman, quite capable, in my opinion, of laying such a snare as seemed to have been laid now. If I had any influence with Alma, the first use of it would be to get rid of Fedora.

When I reached my office I destroyed all traces of the poison and filled the little green bottle with strong scent. After what madame had said about the syringe, I decided not to destroy it, but to return it to her after a time; and I locked it away in the secret drawer of my safe.

From the office I went to my rooms, to explain my absence on the preceding night and to get a change of clothes; and on my way to Alma's I purchased a common syringe for madame.

Alma greeted me with a smile, and I was delighted to see that the night's rest had enabled her almost entirely to throw off the effects of the shock of the previous day's horrors.

"I am so glad you have come. I am anxious to talk over all this terrible affair with you. Have you heard the sad news about Dr. Busch?"

"Yes. The police agent, Grovski, told me early this morning."

"At any other time I should have been terribly

shocked," she answered, with a sigh; "but my father's death appears to have dwarfed everything else. I seem scarcely able to realise it yet. I catch myself expecting to see him enter the room and have a strange thought that I ought to go and consult him about all that has to be done. You see, his has always been the master mind in everything."

"It is a natural feeling; but you will have to accustom yourself to your new authority."

"It is so strange to have everyone coming to me for directions. I don't think I like it. And there is another thing. I feel a sort of shame because I cannot grieve for my father as I should. I did not realise before, how entirely my love for him had been killed. I know I can speak freely to you; and, if I tell the truth, I am rather relieved than otherwise. He was so hard, so harsh, and sometimes so cruel, that I can't keep down a feeling of relief that it is all over. Is not that a dreadful thought for a daughter to entertain? And I tried all my life long to love him and to get him to love me."

"He was not a man to think much of any of the softer feelings."

"He loved my mother. I know that. Almost worshipped her; and it was because my birth cost her her life that he turned against me. I know he loved her, because one day, years ago, I found on his desk some of the old letters that had passed between them. He kept them to the last, I believe. They used to be in a secret drawer of his desk; and I want to read them again to lessen, if I can, this unnatural hardness of mine toward him. I want to realise that there was a bright side to his life by which I

can remember him. There was so much that was dark and repellent. Will you help me ? "

" Why, of course." I was only too delighted to have the chance. " What can I do ? "

" I don't wish anyone but us two to know the secret. Others would laugh ; even Madame de Courtennes. She hated him so."

" How can I help you ? "

" The police agents will search his papers, and I wish to keep these letters from them. I suppose I may do that ? We could get them at once from their hiding place, and then you could keep them. Will you ? "

I agreed readily enough ; and we went upstairs to the room adjoining that in which the murder had taken place, and from a drawer within a secret compartment of an old desk, Alma took out a packet and handed it to me.

" Now I don't mind what the police discover," she said. "But I was afraid to come and take them alone."

We returned to the room below, and Alma unfastened the string which held the packet together ; and then I saw that, in addition to the letters of which she had spoken, there was a book.

She did not notice this, being engrossed by her desire to get at the letters. She read some of them to me, with many signs of deep feeling. " I have nothing of my mother's," she said simply ; and at the sight of one from her mother the tears stood thick in her eyes and her voice was choked with emotion.

" Oh, if she had only lived ! " she murmured.

It was as she had said. The letters breathed the spirit of a devoted love on the part of a man whom

the world knew only as one of the hardest of his kind; and I could scarcely have believed that the tyrant I had known could have felt so intensely as these letters proved.

When the reading was finished she fastened up the packet and holding it a moment sighed. "I wish I dared show these to madame"; but she shook her head.

"That reminds me," I said, to take her thoughts from the letters. "I have a needle syringe for her. She is suffering greatly to-day, she told me."

"I will take it to her"; and Alma went away with it at once, giving me the packet.

I was tying the book up with them when, in curiosity, I opened it. It was a roughly-kept diary, perhaps half filled with entries under various dates.

I glanced idly through some pages, reading at random, when suddenly my attention was riveted upon an entry, the date of which was some few months before.

> "The plot I scented is developing, and certainly Alma is in it. I now know why I was ill on Thursday. She had brought me that tea with her own hands. To-day she gave me some sweets—unusual enough to rouse a fool's suspicions. But it is she who is the fool. I tasted one. It was enough. It was poisoned. Arsenic."

I was staring at this amazing entry when a voice close to my elbow broke in. "Hullo, friend Englishman, what have you got there?"

I turned quickly to find that Count Kaspar had entered the room and was staring curiously over my shoulder.

CHAPTER IV.

SINISTER COMPLICATIONS.

COUNT KASPAR was a handsome fellow with a plausible tongue and ready laugh; but about the last man I wished to see the letters and diary, so I thrust them hurriedly into my pocket.

He noticed the action, but made no remark about it. He said he had just arrived from Orel, and described in great detail the discomforts of the slow train by which he had travelled.

It was a lie, of course. I had seen him in Moscow after the last train had gone to Orel, but he was obviously anxious to convince me that he had not passed the night in the city. Why? The question puzzled me. Then, in answer to his questions, I told him what I knew about the tragedy of the previous night, and that Alma had asked me to look after matters for her.

"And now, how do we stand?" he asked somewhat abruptly. "Is it more than a business help? You know the family wish—that Alma should marry me? Are you for or against us?"

"That is surely a matter for mademoiselle herself to decide."

"Diplomatic, but scarcely satisfying," he answered wagging his head. "It's not her intentions, but yours I wish to know. You see, I get the title, but she has the fortune, and one has to think of such considerations. You care for her, don't you?"

"Suppose we drop the subject," I said curtly.

He shrugged his shoulders and, before he could answer, Alma came in. He repeated the lie about his having just hurried from Orel, expressed his pleasure that she was bearing up well, offered his services, smiled airily when they were declined, and went off jauntily to "get rid of the traces of the train journey," as he put it.

"I wonder why I dislike and distrust him so," exclaimed Alma. "Under every word he utters I look for some hidden meaning, and every time he smiles I feel inclined to shudder. I hope he did not see my father's letters."

"I think not; they were already tied in a packet, and I was glancing at the diary when I found him at my elbow. Do you know your father had left one? There are some strange entries in it."

I read some of them and Alma told me her father had gone in almost daily expectation of some attack. She was greatly surprised to learn that he suspected anyone in the house, and both agitated and indignant on reading the entries about herself and the references to the poisoned sweets and tea.

To turn her thoughts from the subject, I questioned her about the valet, Eikov; and all she told me agreed with what I had already heard from the police.

"My father went to Tula specially to see Colonel

Valovitch, an old friend with whom Eikov had been for years, to make certain that he was entirely trustworthy. He was thoroughly satisfied, and often spoke of the man in terms of the highest praise both before his face and to me alone."

"And now about another person—your maid, Fedora?"

Alma laughed at the bare thought of suspecting her. "I would trust her with everything I have, Mr. Enderby," she declared positively.

"And I would not trust her with a kopeck," I replied, and went on to describe what had occurred during the night. But Alma accounted for it by saying that the girl was a martyr to neuralgia, and had the run of any medicines there were, and had probably been in search of something of the sort when I had seen her in the room.

"Has she a lover?"

Alma smiled. "I don't know. She is not pretty, is she?"

"An ugly woman with a lover is more dangerous at times than a pretty one," I said, and suggested that we should search her room. I told Alma then of the poison I had found in the scent bottle; but I had great difficulty in persuading her to allow me to make the search and she only yielded after much reluctance.

The instant I entered the room I saw that Fedora had already prepared everything in anticipation of a search by the police. Nothing was locked, and a few minutes sufficed to show that she had destroyed everything which would compromise her. I was turning to leave the room when I noticed some

fragments of paper on the window ledge between the casement and the parapet.

I opened the window and secured them. There were only two—the scorched remnants of some papers which had been torn up and burnt and tossed out of the window. The rest of the tinder had been blown away, but these two had fallen on a damp spot and had apparently escaped the notice of the person who had obviously been so anxious for their destruction.

They repaid me for all the trouble of the search. One was a portion of a poison label, the other was part of a letter. This was a mere scrap, with the last three letters of what appeared to have been the signature—"par." And two or three words above them were in the handwriting of Count Kaspar.

The inferences to be drawn from this discovery were both sinister and obvious. Fedora had a lover, and that lover was Alma's cousin. The fact that I had met him on the previous night when he was supposed to be in Orel, and his lies to Alma and me about his hurried journey that morning, were to be read in connection with this discovery and pointed ominously to the fact that in some way he had had a hand in the tragedy.

When we returned to Alma's room I showed her the two scraps of paper; but she was very staunch in her defence of Fedora. "It does not mean anything," she declared, "I told you that Fedora suffers from neuralgia, and no doubt she had to buy a drug with the police caution on it."

"But if the drug were of that sort, why destroy the evidence of where she bought it? And what of this other scrap? You know the writing?"

Alma wrinkled her brows. "It is Kaspar's, of course," she admitted.

"What does it suggest to you?"

"I don't know what to think," she said, greatly distressed.

"Well, you heard your cousin say that he had hurried from Orel this morning; but as a matter of fact I met him in the city last night. He was coming in the direction from this house, and the time was about that when the tragedy occurred."

"Surely you don't connect him with that!" protested Alma, almost indignantly.

"I am only telling you the facts which you ought to know. The position is far too grave for either of us to blink the facts; and there is another which you must know. Your father died, not from a dagger-thrust at the hands of the Terrorists, but—from poison. Dr. Busch told me that last night; and if he had lived until to-day he would have embodied it in his report. The poison was prussic acid, and it was administered by means of a hypodermic syringe. I myself found the syringe in his room; it is the one which Madame de Courtennes has lost; and it showed traces of having been charged with prussic acid. Some of the same poison was in your scent bottle. Now, how came it there?"

Alma was intensely agitated. "This is all too horrible!" she cried.

"Someone must have put it there. Who? Not you, certainly; and equally certainly, not Madame de Courtennes. Who, then? Obviously someone who had free access to your bureau. Why was it put there? Can you think of any motive except to

throw suspicion upon either you or madame? I cannot. Accepting that explanation for a moment it follows that the person who put it there knew the real cause of your father's death."

"You are terrifying me," exclaimed Alma, distractedly.

"I am sorry to distress you so; but you must know these things. Go back for a moment to the entries in your father's diary which concern you, and see how one of them fits into this puzzle. I mean that in which he refers to his having questioned someone in the household. Who would he be most likely to question about you?"

"But what has that to do with this?"

"A great deal. Assume again that the person questioned understood the motive for the questions —suspicion of you—and it follows that they would suggest a means by which suspicion of having actually committed this deed might be fastened upon you in order to avert suspicion from herself—or another."

"It is too horrible. I cannot believe it. I cannot. I cannot," protested Alma vehemently.

"That is because you have always believed in Fedora."

"But even if she had contemplated such abominable treachery why should she come here at night to search for it?"

"There are two reasons, either of which will fit the case. She may have wished to make sure that the poison was still here and would be found by the police when they searched your bureau; or, having learnt that the deed was attributed to the Terrorists,

she may have meant to destroy the evidence implicating you, as it was no longer needed to turn suspicion from herself."

"No, no. I cannot believe it for a moment. I cannot. I cannot," protested Alma again, after a pause. "She is absolutely incapable of such a thing."

"You did not believe it possible that she and your cousin could be associated in any such relations as this letter proves. Indeed, the whole mystery is surrounded by things which at first sight appear impossible of belief. Eikov, a man of unblemished character, turns out to be a thief, if not actually a murderer. Your cousin tells you he is going to Orel, and I meet him here in Moscow within a few minutes of the tragedy. Your father who has escaped death fifty times in circumstances of infinite peril, meets it in the silence of the night and the safe solitude of his own room. Strangest of all, perhaps, we find in his own writing that of all innocent persons in the world, his morbid mind harbours suspicions of foul play against you. I tell you that in such a case all the probabilities must be subordinated to the actual facts, and we must rely upon these and upon these only."

"I don't know what to think. I can't think, indeed," she cried, in the deepest distress and perplexity.

"I can understand how difficult you find it to suspect those you have trusted, but you must act as if you did. I believe that, of all the persons in this house at the present moment, your maid, Fedora, is the most dangerous to you, and I urge you not to lose one second in getting rid of her."

"But I—I can't do that. It is—is impossible. You don't understand"; and Alma buried her face in her hands, a prey to almost passionate agitation.

"Why impossible?" I asked, struck by her words and manner.

"I—I dare not," she replied in a whisper.

"You had better tell me. It is very serious," I urged after a pause. "You mean that she has some sort of hold over you? For God's sake, tell me everything."

There was a long pause, and her silence filled me with vague alarms.

"I will tell you," she said, presently, her face white as death and her voice shaken and all unsteady. "My heart has often bled for many of those who have been the victims of my father's violence and injustice, and, to save the women and children, I have often given information which enabled them to avoid arrest."

"Who knows of this?" I asked, endeavouring to hide my dismay at this news. "Fedora?"

She nodded. "I had no one else to trust."

"And the people you saved? Were they political offenders?"

She nodded again. "You do not blame me?"

"No, indeed; but we must get this clear. You were influenced by her? I mean that she suggested the thing to you in the first instance?"

"She used to tell me of the horrible injustice these people suffered and the cruelty."

"She is one of them, then? One of the Young Russia Party?

"Yes."

"Have you committed yourself in any way to them or yourself seen any of their leaders?"

"Only one. Your friend, Loris Gortoff. He came to thank me at first, and afterwards to suggest that I should get certain information. I tried to stop, but ——" she threw up her hands with an expressive gesture "I found I had gone too far to retreat."

This was a complication indeed. Alma in league with the Terrorists and in direct communication with one of the leaders! The sinister possibilities of it alarmed me intensely; and only with a great effort was I able to conceal from her the dismay with which I had heard the news.

If so much as a hint of it reached the ears of the police, they would arrest her instantly; and as I realised this, I saw the diabolical ingenuity of the woman who had lured her into the net and had then sought to implicate her in the crime of the previous night.

But I kept all these thoughts to myself and did my best to reassure Alma. "These people are very staunch to their friends and probably nothing will come of it," I said, forcing a smile.

"I am glad you do not think it very serious," she replied.

But I did. It was by far the most dangerous complication of all and fraught with sinister possibilities, the thought of which filled me with fear for her.

CHAPTER V.

EIKOV.

ONE of the strangest features of the mystery surrounding the General's death was the multiplicity of theories, each supported by a certain amount of evidence.

In the first place, Gortoff and the police were convinced that it was the work of the Terrorists, and Eskatoff himself had boasted of the deed, and the tag on the dagger and the mutilation of the body afforded strong confirmation of that view.

Some of the servants, however, were quite as positive that Eikov was the assassin and the robbery and his flight were unquestionably strongly suggestive proofs of their opinion.

Dr. Busch, on the other hand, had been quite clear that death was due to poison. I myself had found the poison and the syringe by which it had been administered, and my discovery of the scraps of paper in Fedora's room, combined with her conduct, her illicit association with Count Kaspar and the latter's secret presence in the city, had convinced me that they had had a hand in the affair.

I could not shake off that conviction. I knew that

Kaspar was heavily in debt; I believed him to be utterly unscrupulous; he was about the last man in the world to make love to such an ugly girl as Fedora, unless he had some powerful ulterior motive; and as I turned the matter over, I saw what might very well be that motive. The money which would come to him from his uncle would not be much; but when once the General was dead, Kaspar became the heir to Alma's fortune; and the miscreant who was daring enough to murder the father was not likely to flinch from killing the daughter.

Dismayed by the fear of Alma's danger, if these thoughts of mine had any shadow of foundation, I questioned old Ivan, the porter, in order to trace Fedora's movements the previous night.

My questions led to a bewildering result.

"Do I think anyone could have got into the house?" he replied, repeating my question, with a dry smile. "The police think it would have been difficult. But do they suppose the women servants have no lovers and never go out to meet them on the sly? Do women always shut the doors after them when out on such tricks? And can't they lie when questioned? Rosa, Stephanie, the German girl, Gretchen, even my lady's own maid, Fedora—what are they all but women and when did women cease to hunger for an intrigue?"

"And some of these were out last night?"

"I know that two were—Stephanie and Fedora; but doors need not be left open, sir, when there are windows opening to the ground."

"Do you know anything of their lovers?"

"It is not the lovers who need be suspected.

Cannot a man get in by the same way a woman can get out? That is how my poor master was murdered, sir. I want to tell you. It was no Terrorist work at all. I know the murderer. It was Paul Palutin. The General had him imprisoned years ago; and he swore then that he would be revenged. My master knew that he was out of prison and he told me that Palutin had threatened him recently. He and that smooth rascal, Eikov, did this together."

I stared at Ivan in sheer amazement and a sentence I had read in the General's diary flashed across my thoughts.

"Paul Palutin. Convicted. Seven years. Dangerous. To be watched on expiration of sentence"; and an addition in different ink gave the date of his release, just two months previously.

Could old Ivan be right and all the rest of us wrong?

The police agent, Grovski, was still in the house and I repeated Ivan's story to him. But he was saturated with the conviction that the assassination was the work of the Terrorists, and, when Ivan could not say that Palutin was one of them, Grovski's interest in the story ceased.

But mine did not and I made a close study of the General's diary. It was characteristic of him. He had been a man of few words; and the same sparing use of them marked these entries. They recorded certain facts of a personal nature in the baldest and briefest manner. The various attempts on his life; the date of each, a name or two of either the known or supposed perpetrators; the reason for the failure; and so on. Here is one:

"May 21st, 1904. Shot at. St. Mark's Square. Narrow escape. Riboloff. Convicted. Died in prison." The last word or two in a different ink.

In many instances there was just a name under a date, with a single epithet, such as "Dangerous," "Harmless," "To be watched."

I found a further reference to Paul Palutin, under a date a few days before the murder. "Palutin. In Moscow. Very dangerous. Must act."

In only one other instance in the whole of the book was the word "very" used to emphasize the epithet of "dangerous," and from the pen of such a man the single word was more eloquent than volumes would have been from another. I could picture the stern harsh tyrant watching his enemy's movements in grim fearless silence, conscious of his danger and waiting, waiting, waiting, with the patience of a beast of prey, until the moment came when he should close his relentless grip upon his victim and fling him away into the silence of a dungeon and crush the life out of him by the iron hand of his power.

Absorbed by the contemplation of the feud between these two deadly enemies which I had seemed to watch in the growing through the few entries about it, I was about to close the book, when I noticed one or two entries which I had overlooked. Among them was one which tossed every previous suggestion back into the crucible of mystery and started a fresh train of bewildering perplexities.

It was this:

"Dr. Busch. Reported member Y.R.P. Relative of Rosa N. Watch carefully."

The doctor known to be a member of the Young Russia Party! And at the same time the trusted medical attendant of the General! It seemed incredible.

Could the General have dared to leave himself in the hands of a revolutionary whose comrades had condemned him to death and had freely offered their lives in the effort to assassinate him?

He had indeed been well termed the man with the nerves of cold steel.

This discovery was even more staggering than any I had yet made, for it went right to the root of all the theories I had formed. That statement of his about poison as the cause of death might be nothing but a lie. He had either done the deed himself, or having found it done, had set to work to cover up the facts so as to save his friends and lead us all astray about the real cause. After all, it was probably Eskatoff's or Palutin's knife which had killed the General, and the poison theory was no more than a false scent deliberately dragged across the trail.

And yet, there was that deadly little poison-filled syringe which I had found in the room of death! Had the doctor himself dropped it where he knew I should be likely to find it; and was that the reason why he had taken me to the room with him?

I could not guess the answer to these riddles. Each succeeding discovery only served to further complicate the intricacies of the mystery and to heighten my fears on Alma's account. It was impossible not to see that she might find herself in a position of real peril from the police, or her rascally

cousin, or through her unfortunate association with the Terrorists.

There was but one path of safety for her—to leave the country. My sister had invited her to visit us and I determined to urge her to go as soon as the excitement caused by the assassination had in some degree subsided. I was also rather anxious to leave. The money of mine which had been given to Eskatoff might be traced to me, and if any questions were asked I much preferred to answer them from England. But I waited until after the General's funeral.

Meanwhile the police theory was confirmed by the doctors whom they called in, and some news which clearly connected the valet with the robbery. Some of the stolen notes were changed in Berlin and a telegraphed description, obtained from the German police, established his identity as the man who changed them.

Alma was delighted with the suggestion that she should go to London. "But can I go, Mr. Enderby?" she asked. "Notary Donoff told me I could not leave the country without a formal permit from St. Petersburg, because I am a ward of the Emperor."

"I scarcely think that the penalty of going without leave would be very serious. You might ask for it when you reach London."

"Ah, but Russia is not England, you know."

"True; but England is not a bad place to visit, however long such a visit might last."

"A long visit?" she echoed, crinkling her brows.

"It is not worth while to go to London for a few days only." If I had my way she would never

return. I think she understood this, although I had not yet asked the question which had been so often on my lips.

"I should love it," she exclaimed excitedly. "To see England, I mean," she added in sudden confusion as she dropped her eye and the colour rushed to her cheeks.

The temptation to tell her all that was in my heart was almost overpowering; but I could not take advantage of this time of her weakness and trouble to ask her to be my wife. "You would love England," I answered and launched out in praise of my country.

"Stop, stop, please"! she interrupted me presently. "Remember that Notary Donoff told me I had to live my life in Russia or forfeit my inheritance. Don't dazzle me."

"England might reconcile you even to that," I replied ardently, and as our eyes met and our hands touched, I felt that she understood. I hurried away, lest the temptation to put my feelings into words should prove irresistible.

I went to my office and being in little mood for transacting any business was annoyed to find that my manager, Richard Crossley, was absent and had left me the task of selecting a clerk in place of one who had suddenly gone away. We were always very particular in selecting our men; and he had weeded out all but two of the applicants; and these two were waiting for me to see them.

The first man did not answer my questions to my satisfaction, so I had the second in—a man named Ivan Buloff. He had more the appearance of a

gentleman's servant than that of a clerk; and had not had the experience we needed; but I liked his looks. His face fell when I told him his lack of experience was a barrier and, declaring that he could do the work, he handed me some further papers.

I was surprised to see that the first letter was from my friend Gortoff, and looking through the rest I made an astounding discovery.

"Come a bit closer," I said. He came, greatly wondering. "You have been a valet," I continued in a lower tone. "You were in the service of Colonel Valovitch at Tula; you were highly recommended to General Kasslov; and your name is not Buloff. Don't deny it; because you've left a letter here by mistake which proves it. Just explain."

He turned as white as death and glanced toward the door. I put myself in the way. He might well be alarmed; for he was the missing valet, Ivan Eikov, for whom the police were searching half Europe.

He gazed at me for some moments in speechless consternation and terror, and then with a sigh of despair admitted the truth. A long tense silence followed.

"Will you hear my story, sir?" he asked at length, his voice faltering. "Gortoff said you would, if I showed you his letter." I nodded and then he told it me. And a strange enough story it was.

About two years previously the woman he loved, Sophia Vostock, had been arrested, and while in prison had been ill-treated—knouted, he declared—to make her confess things about her mistress. She had died as the result; and in the passion of the

moment, he had joined the Young Russia Party. After that his life was no longer his own.

"What was the mistress's name?" I interposed.

"The Countess Rosa Nomanhoff. You remember the case, sir?" he asked seeing my start of surprise as I recalled the mention of "Rosa N." in the General's diary in connection with Dr. Busch.

"Go on," I said with a wave of the hand.

The sequel was quite as surprising. When General Kasslov was in need of a valet, one of the Terrorists applied for the situation in Eikov's name and obtained the place because of the high character which Colonel Valovitch gave to the real Ivan Eikov.

"I am utterly ruined, sir, in consequence, for my name is branded all over Europe as that of a murderer and a thief. I wish to heaven I had had the courage to refuse and let them kill me as they threatened."

I believed him and pitied him intensely. It was just such a plan as these desperate men would conceive for the assassination of the General. He admitted that his letters of recommendation to me were false; but protested that he was still an honest man and would serve me faithfully if I would but give him the chance.

It was a risky step to take; but I decided in his favour, and it turned out to be fortunate indeed that I took the risk. I told him his duties and then questioned him eagerly about the case of the Countess Nomanhoff.

"She was suspected of being a member of the revolutionary party and was arrested. Every means at the disposal of the police were employed to force

a confession from her; but although nothing was ever proved, she was never seen again. It is believed that she died in prison."

"It was General Kasslov's doing?"

"Yes, sir, that as well as the treatment of my poor Sophia."

"But she had friends?"

"Friends were powerless against the iron will of the General. Even Dr. Busch, his doctor, pleaded in vain for mercy for her. When such deeds are done, there is only one resource left to the people—vengeance."

I needed no more to enable me to appreciate the sinister significance of the entry in the diary about the doctor and to understand that the official murder of his friend had roused a desire for the wild justice of revenge.

CHAPTER VI.

ALMA IS THREATENED.

ONE of the chief results of Eikov's story was to increase my alarm for Alma's safety. If a woman of the Countess Nomanhoff's rank could be treated in such a way with impunity, what would be Alma's chance of escape if once the finger of suspicion were pointed at her ?

Not a moment must be lost in getting her away, and I went round at once to the British Consulate, to ask Alec Peterson to tell me all about the means to be adopted to obtain the permit for Alma to leave the country.

" Might take three days or three months," was his discouraging reply ; and when I mentioned Alma's name, he doubted if it would be granted at all, and he wanted to talk about her father's death. " I should just love to try my hand at unravelling that mystery. You know my weakness for detective work," he said.

But I was in no sort of mood to discuss the matter. I put him off with a promise to give him a chance to do something if the need arose, and went home very depressed by the prospective difficulties of getting Alma away from Moscow.

So much might occur in three months, or even in three weeks, that any such delay was out of the question. Permit or no permit, Alma must leave at once; and I spent a couple of hours that evening planning the easiest and safest means by which I could rush Alma across the frontier, and marshalling the reasons by which I could persuade her to go.

I had just put away my maps and time-table when Gortoff came in to repay me the money he had borrowed on the night of the tragedy. I explained my belief that the use he had made of it might bring me into trouble, but he laughed at the idea.

"We should never allow that. One of our friends will, if necessary, account for it. He'll admit that he stole it from you in the garden; and of course you are above suspicion."

The proposition almost took my breath away. "Do you mean you'd have me give evidence on oath to such a thing? My dear Gortoff!" I protested.

"He would be one of those already in prison, so what would it matter?"

"A great deal to me, of course. I couldn't dream of such a thing. But there, we'll leave it until the question is actually raised."

"Very well, so long as you feel assured we shan't let you be troubled. There's another thing. I wish to thank you for taking on Eikov. You'll never regret it."

"You know that he told me about another man having taken his name as General Kasslov's valet."

"Yes. I advised him to be frank, if you had any suspicions. He could not help himself in that matter, of course; and he has gained what he wished

—revenge. You don't yet understand us Russians, Enderby."

"You mean that the man who took his place did the deed?"

"I know it," he replied calmly. But his eyes lighted as he continued. "You have heard me speak of our great leader, Antonin Gregov. It was no other than Gregov himself. He planned it; every detail. Disgusted by the dozen failures to remove that tyrant, he resolved to do it himself. He is the one man in Russia who never fails."

"What about Eskatoff, then?"

"He helped at the last moment. Only three of us know the real truth. In the eyes of everyone else Eskatoff has all the glory of the deed. That is Gregov's own wish."

"Then why do you tell me?" I asked.

He paused to roll a cigarette, and looked at me earnestly as he lit it. "I have a reason, and it's partly that which has brought me here now."

"I'd much rather not hear it if it's political."

"A great coup has been planned. The greatest of all as yet; and again by Antonin Gregov," he said, his eyes closely fixed on my face. "Do you know that we have always had a friend in Mademoiselle Kasslov?"

"You don't want to drag her in further, surely?" I protested.

"I know how you feel toward her, Enderby; and she herself would wish you to do what I am going to ask. Her sympathies are with us, just as yours are, on general grounds. But she is committed to us, of course."

His manner made me extremely uneasy. "Well?" I asked, impatiently.

"She has given us much useful information, and of course won't be able to do that now; but——" He paused again and fiddled with his cigarette, affecting to re-light it. "I have news for you. The General's successor has been appointed. He is a great friend of your father's, and so, of course, of yours. It is Baron Vodolski. Ah, you are surprised. Well, he is a man who would be disposed to make a great favourite of you, and ——"

"That'll do," I interposed sharply. "I see your drift now, and I won't have anything to do with it. That's my last word. Anything more will break off our friendship, Gortoff."

"Don't say that. It is Alma Kasslov who asks this of you, as well as I. Think it over carefully, and remember that if you refuse, my companions will think she has not done her duty. Don't force that, Enderby; it might be very serious for her, very serious indeed. Remember, too, that the cause stands before all thoughts of friendship. Think it over. I'll see you again in a day or two; and meanwhile you can talk to mademoiselle herself." And with that he went away, leaving me speechless with indignation.

I was to turn revolutionary and to deceive my father's old friend in order to worm official secrets out of him in confidence and hand them on to the Young Russia Party! If I refused, the consequences were to fall upon the woman I loved; and how drastic those might be Eikov's case suggested.

I decided to see Alma the following day, and urge

instant departure; but I was prevented. Some of the St. Petersburg people interested in our patent arrived unexpectedly, and kept me with them until it was too late to go to Alma. I chafed at the delay, for every hour was now of importance; but I could not get to her until the following afternoon; and the instant we met I saw that something had occurred to upset her.

"I expected you yesterday," she said.

"And I was fuming the whole day because I could not get here. Some big wigs came down from St. Petersburg and kept me dancing attendance upon them the whole day."

"I don't know that it would have made any difference even if you had come."

"What has happened? I can see you are troubled."

"We were busy all day making preparations to go away; but——" She paused and tossed up her hands expressively. "It is no use, after all."

"Tell me, please."

"The news has got out. The news of my journey, I mean."

"Who knew it?"

"No one except Madame de Courtennes and, of course, Fedora. I had to tell her what things I should need with me. Why do you look like that?" she asked quickly, for my face had fallen at the mention of Feodora.

"Because I think that the matter has leaked out through her. She would probably tell your cousin, for one thing."

"That might not have mattered much."

"I do not trust her, as you know. But what has happened?"

"I am almost afraid to tell you. I have had a visit this morning from Gortoff. He and his friends forbid me to go," she said, with a sigh.

"I have seen him also. He came to me the night before last; and I expect I can guess what he had to say to you. He told me that Baron Vodolski, an old friend of my father's, had been appointed to the Governorship, and he put it to me that I should worm my way into his confidence in order to get secret information for the Young Russia Party, and declared that you would wish it also."

"Of course, I do not! I am not so base as that. It is infamous," she cried, her eyes sparkling with indignation. "Let them do what they will."

"What did he say they would do? Did he threaten you?"

"He declared that I should be accused of being an accomplice in my father's death."

"The infernal cowards!" I exclaimed passionately.

"Somehow, they have learnt of the existence of my father's diary and of those entries about me; and they know that you have it, and will implicate you also for having suppressed it. Oh, what trouble I have brought upon you!" and she wrung her hands with a deep sigh of despair.

It was, indeed, an ugly development. "We mustn't make too much of it," I said reassuringly. "I shall have something to say if they try such tactics. I'll see Gortoff. He has told me things which will make matters pretty warm for him;

and if he drives me to the wall, he'll find I can bite. But now, what are we to do?"

"I dare not think of going. I don't know what to do?"

"The first thing is to deal with that maid of yours. We may take it for granted that she has told your cousin as well as Gortoff's people; and now that we know she's as treacherous as a snake, we must contrive to use her. We will let her know just so much as we wish these others to believe, and no more."

"I wish I had taken your advice and not trusted her."

"She is even more dangerous than I first thought. I have no doubt she had seen the diary and letters before, and when they were not found by the police she guessed that you had taken them. Your cousin saw them in my hands, and together they have stumbled on the truth."

"She may have seen that poison," said Alma, turning very white.

"I have no doubt of it. She put it where I found it."

"But if she swore a false tale about it, her evidence might——" She could not finish the sentence, and shuddered as she pressed her hands to her face.

"You must not give way like that, Alma," I said, deeply moved by her emotion. "We shall find a way out. Trust me"; and I laid a hand on her arm.

She let hers slip into mine and looked up at me with misery-filled eyes. "They would swear my life away," she moaned.

"You must be brave and face things until the way out is found."

"Even you could not help me then; but I will do whatever you wish," she murmured, with a brave attempt to smile. "I am horribly frightened."

"We shall both be smiling at it all soon, and with more heart in it than in that smile of yours."

"I feel as if I would never smile again in earnest," she answered, sighing.

"If you will trust to me I promise that you shall be out of the city within twenty-four hours and then across the frontier. But you must understand first what it may mean."

"Tell me," she whispered, after a pause.

"We shall have to leave secretly and—alone."

She trembled and shook her head. "But if I were to fly like that they would charge me with this horrible thing in my absence; and my flight would look like guilt."

"No. They are merely threatening this in order to keep you here to force me to do what they want. They will stop our going, if they can; but if we are once away, they would have nothing to gain by any such futile accusation. More than that, they know the truth about your father's death, and that will soon be known to all Russia. But there are other consequences for you to face, other sacrifices."

"What are they?"

I hesitated a moment. I had shrunk from asking her to pledge herself to me while in this trouble; but the crisis was too grave for any such considerations now. "You would lose your fortune and

might never return to Russia. Would you make that sacrifice for—for me, Alma ?"

The answer was in her glowing eyes and her flushed cheeks as she raised her head and looked at me. I held out my arms and my heart throbbed violently as she gave herself to me, and I gathered her in my arms.

"My dearest," I murmured passionately, as our lips met. "I will answer for your safety with my life."

CHAPTER VII.

A SERIOUS CHECK.

BEFORE we parted Alma and I had settled our plan. No one, not even Madame de Courtennes, was to be taken into our confidence. Alma was to continue the preparations for a journey, leaving Fedora to understand that we should not leave until the following Friday, three days later.

This would lead those with whom Fedora was in communication to believe that they would have ample time in which to take steps to prevent Alma going. But our real intention was to start that same night at eleven o'clock.

Since her father's death, Alma had been sleeping in a room on the ground floor, the French windows of which opened on to a verandah, and she would thus be able to get out of the house secretly; and at that hour I was to have my motor at hand for the first stage of the journey.

A thirty-mile run would take us to a junction where the mail for Smolensk stopped; and if all went well, we should reach there before Alma's absence would be discovered. We should cut the trail there and travel on to Vilna by a different

train, and at that place decide whether to make for the Polish or Prussian frontier.

I had a good deal to do before leaving, the chief difficulty being to get a passport. But in this I had a stroke of luck. I had to take my manager, Crossley, into my confidence, as I did not intend to return, and as it chanced, he had in his possession the passport of one of our representatives, a Frenchman named Dufaure, and his sister. The descriptions did not fit us very well; but I reckoned that our wits and a judicious bribe or two would help us out. Money talks very eloquently in Russia.

Crossley was to see that the car was in perfect order and pick me up at my rooms, where I went to put together the things I should need for the journey. I was packing these when I remembered that I had to get the General's diary from the safe at the office, as that was too dangerous a piece of evidence to leave behind us in Moscow.

It was already ten o'clock and I hurried to the office. I was very confident of success, now that the difficulty of the passport had been overcome. Alma and I both spoke French fluently and could pass for a French couple without much fear of discovery; and I was in high spirits at the thought of the little comedy of our new relationship.

A few minutes sufficed for me to get the diary and, as I pocketed it, intending to burn it in my stove while I completed my packing, I breathed a sigh of relief at the thought that in less than an hour we should be on our way and well clear of the city.

But at that very moment Fortune turned her back on us. I gave a last glance round to see that all was

in order, switched off the light and, according to my habit, was crossing the clerks' office in the dark, when two figures sprang at me and a heavy blow on the head knocked me down like a ninepin.

When I recovered my senses I was in bed and Crossley and a doctor were in the room. I was faint and weak and in great pain from the effects of the blow; and it was a long time before I recovered sufficently to understand what had occurred.

Then I learnt that Crossley after waiting in vain with the car for me at my rooms had gone to the office to find me lying insensible on the floor. He had brought me home, calling for the doctor on the way, and the latter had pronounced my injuries serious enough to demand rest for at least some days. There was a slight concussion of the brain; and he declared he would not answer for the consequences if I did not have absolute quiet.

I had no power to oppose him, even if I had had the will; but at that moment I was so weak that my one desire was for rest, and Crossley saw to it that the doctor's injunctions were obeyed to the letter.

It was a week before I was well enough to leave my bed, and during that time he put me off with all sorts of assurances that everything was just as I would have had it. For two days after I was up, he maintained the well-meant deception, but on the third the doctor pronounced me well enough to be told what had really occurred.

It was bad enough. The office had been rifled by the men who had attacked me, my pockets had been emptied, and I had reason to be thankful that

my life had been spared. But the opportunity to get Alma away had passed and what was scarcely less vital, the General's diary was gone, and heaven alone knew what trouble might result.

As soon as I could leave the house, I went to Alma. I found her exceedingly troubled on my account; but I was able to reassure her about myself. I had to tell her of the loss of the diary, explaining the affair as just an ordinary robbery and then asked her eagerly as to her own affairs.

"You must leave Moscow as soon as possible," she answered.

"Because a couple of rascals rob my safe and give me a crack on the head, I must make a bolt of it, eh?" and I shook my head.

"But I wish you to go. Baron Vodolski has arrived."

I knew what this meant. Gortoff and his associates would soon be busy. "Have you obtained a permit to leave?"

"No. But the Baron has the matter in his hands"; and she handed me an official communication she had received from St. Petersburg.

"I'll see him at once and learn what that means."

"There is another thing. Madame de Courtennes has left. She went away secretly yesterday and left a note declaring that she could no longer stand the strain of all these troubles. I think she was frightened by something, or else the facts connected with that poison affected her nerves; but whatever the reason, she has gone."

"Then you are alone in the house? That won't do. You must go and stay with friends, or have

someone reliable to remain here with you"; and I suggested that she should invite my friend Peterson and his sister to stay with her.

She agreed to this readily, and I went off to the Consulate resolved to take him entirely in our confidence and set him to work to unravel the tangle which I had found so impossible of solution.

I told him everything and when I had finished, he plied me with question upon question about every imaginable detail and after he had drawn everything from me he looked very serious indeed.

"You may thank Providence that you found that poison, Enderby, or Alma Kasslov would have gone the same road as her father," was his first comment.

"Good heavens, man, what do you mean?" I cried in profound astonishment.

"I mean that scoundrel of a cousin of hers. It's perfectly clear, in my view, that Kaspar and Fedora are working together; there were only the two lives, hers and her father's, between him and great wealth, I know the fellow is bad enough to commit any crime to get money; a Terrorist outrage would have accounted for two murders just as easily as for one; and they planned the two that night. The one thing to be done instantly is to get Fedora out of the house. We'll go round at once, and I'll send a line to my sister to follow us," he concluded.

"Have you any theory as to who took that diary?" I asked on the way.

"Count Kaspar, in all probability. He and this girl knew all about it, and he engineered this faked robbery in order to get it. It's as plain as the nose on my face, man. Look at the hold it gives over

his cousin" ; and to this view he held, despite all the other considerations I urged.

A few minutes sufficed for him to persuade Alma of the absolute necessity of getting rid of Fedora.

"I believe very strongly indeed that your life is in danger while the woman remains in the house, mademoiselle. In view of that, nothing else matters —I mean, nothing that she can do. Enderby has told me everything, and I am not saying this to alarm you; but you must realise the position and be warned. Send her packing to-night, I say, and let her do what she will; or, better still, let me frighten her out of the house. Send for her now."

This was done, after a short hesitation on Alma's part, and when Fedora came in, she looked nervously at us all in turn, especially at Peterson.

"Now, my girl, you'd better understand the position," he said sternly. "I've been asked by your mistress to investigate this matter of General Kasslov's murder; and I have some questions to ask you. You needn't reply, of course, but if you don't, they'll be put by the police, and perhaps you know something of their methods of forcing you to reply. Now, what is the name of your lover?"

She started uneasily. "I have no lover. You know that, mademoiselle?"

"Don't appeal to your mistress. Attend to me. You have a lover. You met him on the night of the murder and admitted him into this house. Now, who is he?"

"I have no lover," she repeated; but not so firmly this time.

"A lie is always a bad beginning, Fedora. And that is a lie."

"Will you hear me insulted in this way, mademoiselle?"

"You had better answer the questions," said Alma quietly.

"Of what am I suspected then? It is infamous. I will not answer."

"I didn't think you would," said Peterson drily. "But you shall have the chance. Now tell me this —why did you go secretly to your mistress's bureau within an hour or two of the murder?"

"I did not go."

"Mr. Enderby saw you."

"It is untrue. You would take away my character. I am not a thief."

"Then tell me why you went."

"I am not a thief," she exclaimed indignantly.

"Yet you had a key to open the bureau."

Again she started and paused to think. Then she turned on Alma. "Am I to tell all I know about your affairs, mademoiselle," she asked, with a covert threat.

"I have been waiting for that," interposed Peterson sharply. "What is in your thoughts behind the threat?"

She turned quickly from Alma to him with a look of fear as she put her hand to her throat with a catch of the breath and a sort of snarling-down curl of her ugly mouth. Then she dropped her eyes and stood sullenly silent.

He read her moods easily and put question after question, each cunningly framed to suggest his

knowledge of her secrets. But she maintained a dogged silence throughout.

"I'm not surprised by your silence," he concluded. "You see that I know too much for you to attempt to palm off any lies on me; and you cannot tell the truth without convicting yourself. Now, I'll make you this offer. Confess the full truth about your share and that of your lover in this murder and you shall go free and be protected from all consequences. But not the man, mind. Refuse to confess and away you go to the police. I'll give you one hour to decide. Stop in your room and don't attempt to escape, for I know where to look for you. Now go."

She shot a glance of hate at him and left the room without a word.

"You have frightened her, Mr. Peterson, but she will not confess," said Alma.

"My dear Mademoiselle Kasslov, she has probably gone straight out of the house, and that is precisely what I intended her to do"; and that turned out to be perfectly true. "And now about your own course; I am going to venture a suggestion which will probably startle you. It is that you make a clean breast of everything to your father's successor."

"Peterson!" I exclaimed in amazement.

"Think before you cry out. Mademoiselle must break the power which these men have obtained over her. Remember their threat. My advice is—get your blow in first. If we do that, the sting of the other will be drawn."

"But if she were to turn against them, her very life might be in danger," I protested.

"The strongest reason with Vodolski for mademoiselle to get away from Moscow at once. Isn't that what you both wish? He is friendly to you, Enderby; you can prepare him; he will understand the motive of everything; you both go and leave me to ferret out the truth about the assassination."

The risk to Alma alarmed me. It seemed like a counsel of desperation for her to make enemies of the Young Russia Party; and she shrank from it in obvious dread. On the other hand, it was impossible for me to turn spy; and yet if I didn't Alma was almost certain to find herself arrested at the instigation of these reckless men.

We ended by coming to a compromise—that I should go to Vodolski instead of Alma and endeavour to estimate whether such a course was likely to be favourable or the reverse.

At my rooms I found a letter from him asking me to see him the following morning and mentioning Alma's name in a manner which made me fear that, in Peterson's words, the others had "got their blow in first."

It looked ugly, and I could not shake off my foreboding of trouble.

CHAPTER VIII.

ALMA'S DANGER.

BEFORE my interview with Baron Vodolski, which was fixed for noon, I went to my office and presently Eikov came in with some papers. He lingered to thank me once more for having given him a trial and then spoke of the attack and let drop a question, whether some important papers had been stolen.

"Is that only a guess?" I asked.

"No, sir. I have heard something. If you will trust me, I think I can find one of the men concerned in it and I think he could be induced to give the name of his companion."

I jumped at the chance and told him to get to work at once. I shared Peterson's opinion—that Count Kaspar was at the bottom of the thing; and soon after Eikov had left me, the Count himself arrived. He expressed his sympathy with me, congratulated me on my recovery and led by a very roundabout course to the object of his visit.

In a jaunty manner he declared he had heard that Alma was mixed up with the revolutionary party and ended by urging me to persuade her to leave the country. "I admire her immensely, but

I don't wish to marry a Nihilist, my friend," he concluded. "I need her fortune and make no pretence that I don't, but I don't want to come into it because she is convicted of some crime. Of course, it would come to me if she were. Take her away and marry her, therefore. You have that compromising diary safe enough. Destroy it. I shan't open my lips about it if she goes. I should have no object, of course."

So this was his new plan. He had obtained possession of the diary and the price of its destruction was to be Alma's fortune. I would cheerfully have kicked him out of the place; but I kept my temper and let him talk until it was time for me to go to Baron Vodolski.

My foreboding in regard to the interview with the latter was more than fulfilled. His reception was a mixture of friendliness and official formality. He referred to his friendship with my father; spoke of a visit he had paid to him in London; then advised me very pointedly to go home before I became entangled in any trouble, and shook his head ominously when I replied that business kept me in Moscow.

"I put it to you that it will be far the best thing for you to be frank. By 'business' I am afraid you mean Mademoiselle Alma Kasslov. You are very much interested in her, I think? Am I not right in saying that that is behind her request to pay a visit to your family?"

"The greatest wish of my life is to make her my wife," I declared.

"You do not understand us Russians, my boy.

She can never be your wife. As a ward of the Emperor, she will only be permitted to marry one of her own countrymen. But that is the least part of the trouble. I have the permit for her to leave; but I am compelled to withhold it until certain matters are cleared up; and it is really on account of those that I have urged you to go home. Some very strange information has reached us; Dr. Busch examined the body of the late General and was shot accidentally on his way home. His pocket-book has turned up, containing his rough notes; and among them is one to the effect that the cause of the General's death was poison. This throws suspicion upon every one in the house at the time; and until all is clear, his daughter cannot leave the city. You appreciate the gravity of all this, I am sure?"

"I do, of course," I replied. I did, more keenly than he understood.

"Now I think you can give me valuable information about it, and that is another reason why I have asked you to come here to-day"; and he fixed his eyes searchingly upon me as I sat unable for the moment to frame any reply.

It was about the ugliest news that I could have heard. He saw my embarrassment and murmuring something about a matter needing his attention, left me alone for some minutes.

I sat thinking as hard as I could. Should I take Peterson's advice and make a clean breast of everything so far as Alma was concerned? Dared I, in view of the fact that the diary had fallen into other hands? If those entries came out on the top of the

doctor's statement, the case against her would be as black as coal-tar.

These considerations and a hundred others, all unsettled, were whirling through my head when the Baron returned and explained that he had gone out that I might have time to think. "Is there anything you can now tell me?" he asked.

"I knew the doctor's opinion," I admitted.

"There is a note to that effect in his book. It was a very grave error to withhold that. You perceived that suspicion must attach to the General's daughter and presumably that was why you tried to get her away."

"The responsibility is mine and mine only," I declared. "She has acted on my advice."

"A very heavy responsibility, too," he replied rather sternly. "You have been extremely indiscreet. Valuable time has been lost, which the police could have used to make most important inquiries. You have done her a very ill service."

"Will you see her yourself?"

"I shall probably have to do so officially," he answered drily. "But not yet. I am at present concerned with you, my friend's son. Will you take my advice and go home while it is still open to you to do so? Your father would wish it."

"If I have brought any trouble upon Mademoiselle Kasslov, can I leave her in the lurch? My father would not wish that, and if he did, I should not do it."

"I like the spirit of that reply, only ——" he spoke in a less severe tone, but his gesture and expression finished the sentence ominously. A long pause followed and then he said: "I think in the

circumstances I will not ask you any more questions, but I warn you that you are taking a course which may lead you into serious trouble. Mademoiselle Kasslov may be as innocent as——"

"She is," I interjected.

"But if others should not take that view, you must see that you are rendering yourself open to a charge of being accessory to whatever might appear to be proved against her. Again I urge you. Leave Russia."

"What you say does not alarm me in the least. I will not desert her at such a time," I declared vehemently. "Let her have the permit to leave, and I will go."

"Impossible," he replied, shaking his head. Presently he rose, his look very grave and earnest as he laid his hand on my shoulder. "Paul Enderby, do you know what would be the kindest thing I could do for you? To sign the order for your expulsion from the country, have you put across the frontier, and wire your father to meet you. Think matters over for a day or so and see me again," he added as he dismissed me.

I returned to my office very much more troubled on Alma's account than I had yet been. The General's diary had become the pivot on which everything would turn. If the police saw the entries about her they would read them in connection with Dr. Busch's notes, and her arrest, instead of being a vague possibility, would be a dead certainty. And once arrested, heaven alone knew when she would be liberated.

If Count Kaspar had the diary—and the inter-

view with him pointed strongly to that—he might be bought off; and he had suggested his terms—her whole fortune.

But even if that price were paid, Alma would not be safe. She would still have to face the danger from Gortoff and his associates. If they carried out their threat to denounce her and her connection with them was proved, not all the eloquence of all the ablest advocates in Russia would be able to prevent her conviction.

That they meant mischief I learnt almost immediately from Gortoff who came to me in a very angry mood.

"You have been taking steps against us, Enderby. Why?" he demanded.

His tone was much too peremptory to please me. "What do you mean?" I asked sharply. "Do you think you should try to bully me, your friend?"

"I am not here as a friend, but as a member of our party. You and that lawyer, Peterson, have done an act of injustice to one of us—Fedora Douroff."

"What injustice? She was asked some questions and, instead of answering them, left the house secretly."

"Our members are not dogs to prey on one another," he answered bluntly. "Mademoiselle Kasslov is as much one of us as her maid. We don't recognise your class distinctions. You tried to extract some sort of confession from her."

"You're all at sea, man. There is something behind this of which you know nothing and I cannot tell you. That's all about it."

"It is a long way from all, Enderby. We protect our friends just as we punish our enemies. Don't make yourself one or let Alma Kasslov become one."

"The questions to the girl had nothing to do with your party. I give you my word on that. But she could not be allowed to remain in the house. Peterson is inquiring into the thing because we wish to find out the truth."

"You know that already. I told you. It is the work of Antonin Gregov himself. I told you I had seen it over his own signature."

"But Dr. Busch has left a statement that the cause of the General's death was poison, not Gregov's knife."

"It is a lie! A lie, all lies!" he cried passionately. "The pigs of police will say anything to rob us of the credit of a victory"; and he paced the room, flourishing his arms, apparently as anxious to have the credit of the murder for his friends as an ordinary man could have been to prove their innocence.

"What matters to us is not the truth or falsehood of the theory, but its effect upon the action of the police," I said. "They are now disposed to suspect everyone who was in the house at the time; and among them Mademoiselle Kasslov herself."

"It is absurd, monstrous, idiotic!" He burst out into a loud laugh. And a very ill-sounding laugh it was.

"Mademoiselle Kasslov does not laugh at it, nor do I."

"She need not fear," he said, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"That would be all right enough if you were at

the head of the Moscow police, Gortoff ; but as it is, the thing is very serious."

He turned and looked at me steadily and then came up and laid his hand on my shoulder, his eyes glowing and his face alight with enthusiasm. " And what if I were to tell you that I soon shall be ? That the hour of deliverance is at hand ; that our plans have all been laid and are in readiness ; that our great leader, Antonin Gregov, God be good to him and spare him for the noble work ! has succeeded in uniting all the forces of the people and will lead them to victory. The hour is at hand when we, the people, will rule in Moscow, when the death knell of tyranny will be sounded, and we shall be free."

He spoke with all the fire of fanaticism, drunk with the perfect confidence of victory. It was of no use to argue, and worse than useless to express my disbelief. So I held my tongue. But he read my doubts.

" You cannot believe this ; but you will see. And when that hour strikes—and it may be any hour—the truth about the tyrant's death will be openly avowed and Gregov's deed will ring through Russia as the noblest stroke of the whole campaign against our enemies. It will be a great hour for the cause of the people and for their friends ; but a black one for their enemies. Beware how you set yourself against the people now, or lead your friends to do so. The price of desertion will be both black and bloody."

He turned away again and strode up and down the room until his enthusiasm had somewhat abated.

" You have seen Vodolski then ? " he said meaningly, as he resumed his seat.

I guessed what was coming. "I saw him to-day."

"You are going to join with the people's cause?"

"He is an old friend of mine, just as you are. Would you have me betray you to him?"

"Don't play with words," he exclaimed impatiently. "In the present crisis, there is no half-way house. Every man is for or against the people. I have spoken openly to you. You helped me in the matter of that money for Eskatoff. You have helped to shelter Eikov also. The friends know what you have done and all that you know. Mademoiselle Kasslov is one of us. You wish to save her. There is but one way in which you can succeed. We must know Vodolski's plans; and you can get them. What answer shall I take back with me? Your treatment of Fedora Douroff has excited them, and already some are looking upon you as an enemy. For God's sake be careful!"

"I must have time to think, Gortoff," I said, after a long pause. "But I am not a Russian, remember."

He tossed up his hands and rose. "I will see you once again. But my last word is—join us. I cannot help you otherwise. No one can. My oath would prevent me. Join us, I say, or ——". He left the alternative unspoken and went away.

But I needed no words of his to make me understand the gravity of the crisis.

CHAPTER IX.

SCHARKOFF.

NEVER in my life had I been more despondent than after the interviews of that day. The peril was closing in on the woman I loved; closing steadily, surely and inevitably; and I felt utterly powerless to prevent it from crushing her. So intense was my despair that I would not even venture to go to her, lest she should read the trouble in my looks. I sent a note, putting off the interview, and passed the rest of the day in the same condition of brooding wretchedness.

A night's sleep restored my balance, however, and I awoke with one definite purpose fixed in my mind—to recover the diary at any cost.

To my intense satisfaction Eikov had important news which he told me the moment I arrived at the office. He put into my hands one of the notes which had been stolen on the night of the attack, and explained that he had got it in the Riverside quarter from a fellow named Scharkoff, a drunken, dissolute ruffian. He told me how I could identify him and where to find him, but warned me that he was a reckless brute, ready with his knife on the smallest

provocation, and had companions as dangerous as himself, and that the district was one of the worst in all Moscow.

That did not deter me. During the day I thought out my plan and made my preparations and when night fell, I started on the search, dressed as a dirty tramp, with a revolver in my pocket and a tale ready that I was hiding from the police. Compared with the district to which Eikov sent me, the East End of London is a white spot indeed. It was densely populated by the dregs of all the different nationalities in the city. The streets were crowded. Vice, squalor, poverty, rascality, and drunkenness were everywhere. The dirt was appalling. The very air reeked with filth; and the polluting stench which came out of any open doors was sickening.

The haunt of the man I sought was a drinking-hell of the worst description, and I shouldered my way in, called for a drink, and chose a seat from which I could see all that went on. The fact that I was a stranger soon attracted notice and presently a man took a seat close by and began to question me. It was a good rehearsal for the part I had to play. I soon let him know that I was in fear of the police; and I had no money except a couple of roubles. At that, his interest quickly evaporated, and he left me. Dog eats dog readily in the circles of Russian rascality; but I had nothing worth eating.

Not having seen anyone resembling Scharkoff, I was meditating a further prowl in the streets, when a great clamour arose in a room near at hand. The door was flung open and some halfdozen men rushed out in a body, cursing and shouting at one of their

body, whom they accused of having cheated at cards. The object of their abuse fitted Eikov's description closely. He was tall, high-shouldered, as red as Cain, with a long, very ugly hatchet-shaped face, with one eye fixed as if it were artificial, and the other as shifty and vicious as sin.

Fighting and kicking, he came close to where I was and stood at bay, crouching as he faced his assailants, who snarled and yelped at him like a pack of wolvés. I saw my opportunity and took it at once.

"Give the man a chance," I shouted, as I sprang to his side; and when one of them threatened me I crashed my fist into his face and sent him staggering back against his friends. Knives were out in a trice and matters looked ugly for us both. But my unexpected help had put heart into Scharkoff, and he on his side drew a knife.

There was a moment's pause, and then the proprietor of the place with a couple of assistants pushed through into the middle of us, and the affair was soon over. As Scharkoff had been spending money freely in the house for a time, the man sided with him, and his assailants were bundled incontinently into the street.

Scharkoff's explanation was that he had been winning their money, instead of losing as he usually did when in drink, and they had accordingly made a charge of cheating. Whether it was true or false, mattered nothing to me; but it did matter a great deal that I had found him and had in this way placed him under such an obligation.

He believed they would have stabbed him and

having thanked me for my help, he ordered drinks for everyone who would have them; and then we two sat down together to talk.

I told him much the same yarn I had spun to the man who had spoken to me before, and he at once offered me some rouble notes. They were part of what he had taken from my safe, as a glance at the number of one of them showed me.

But that was not the best of it. He was afraid that the fellows who had set upon him would attack him afterwards, and when I hinted that I had nowhere to sleep that night, he asked me to go home with him. I accepted the offer gratefully; and after a time we started for his home, Scharkoff taking a supply of liquor with him.

His room was a vile-smelling den, with a filthy bed in one corner and everything else dirty to match it. But this did not trouble me. I was not going to remain long, and I soon got to work.

Expressing admiration for his knife, I got him to let me examine it; and I tossed it carelessly on the bed and stood between him and it. Then I took out one of the notes he had given me and gave a start of surprise.

"Where the devil did you get this?" I asked.

"It doesn't matter so long as it's good, does it?" he replied with a knowing leer.

I folded it up and slipped it into the pocket where my revolver was, and took that out covertly. "Who was with you in that job?" was my next question.

"What do you know about it?"

"Tell me that and we'll cry quits for to-night's work."

He replied with an oath, and told me to mind my own business.

"It is my business, I'm down here to find out. Tell me quietly, and there'll be no trouble. Now, who was it?"

He was bending over the liquor bottle and looked up with a very threatening expression. "What do you mean?" he growled.

"This." And I covered him. "Don't try any fool's game with me. I'm dangerous."

He started back and felt for his knife.

"I've made sure of that, you know. You'd better tell me."

His fingers closed round the neck of the bottle and he made ready to spring on me as he let out an oath into his red beard.

"If you lift that, I shall fire."

He paused, and we stood staring each into the other's face, both warily conscious that death might hang on the issue of the next few moments.

I could see that he was meditating a fight; and, as his fingers tightened once more on the neck of the bottle, I made just the slightest movement of the trigger finger.

A catch of the breath and a glint in his eye told me that he had noticed it; and his grip relaxed again.

That was my moment. "Put your hands up," I said sternly with a vicious oath. Scoundrels of his sort have to be talked to in the language of oaths.

Slowly his fingers released their hold of the bottle, and his hands went up.

"Turn out your pockets," I ordered next.

He was beaten now. He emptied them, putting the contents on the table with the exception of a roll of notes which he kept in his right hand.

"I shan't take your money, if you go straight. Stand back against the wall there."

He backed away and I bent over the table and looked over what he had turned out. The only things of any account were a couple of scraps of paper and these I picked up to examine closely when he made a rush to grab them. The revolver stopped him, however, and he slunk back to the wall.

The reason for his eagerness was soon apparent. On one of the slips was a message in the handwriting of Count Kaspar.

"To-morrow night."

I looked across at him with a smile of triumph. "You may as well tell me everything, and save yourself. I know this writing."

He made no reply, staring at me sullenly.

In the pause I thought quickly. Why should Count Kaspar employ such a man? He must have known the risk of dealing with a scoundrel of the sort. And then a possible reason occurred to me and I made a shot.

"I shall only give you one more chance, mind. I know more about you than you think. I know the hold which he has over you," and I tapped the scrap of paper. "The police are only waiting for me to bring them here, and then—well, you know what the result will be. Now, will you speak?"

He would infinitely rather have split my head open or have driven a knife between my ribs; but my revolver had scared him right through. Reckless

enough when his blood was up, he lacked cold blood courage.

"I'll tell you," he said, after a short pause; and then out came the story. Cout Kaspar knew about an old crime the fellow had committed and had forced him to make the attack upon me. They had done it together, and when they had knocked me on the head, Kaspar had taken the diary from me and left Scharkoff to help himself to the contents of the safe.

I made him write a few lines admitting the truth, naming Kaspar as the instigator of everything; and then I began to think how to get away. It was no silken proposition by any means, for the instant the restraining influence of my weapon was removed, Scharkoff would do his utmost to regain possession of the evidence against him.

In all probability the house was a nest of rascals who would gladly help him; and he would only have to raise the alarm that I was a spy, for me to find myself in a very awkward fix. The inmates of every house in the district would rush out pell mell to join the hunt.

Scharkoff was watching me like a lynx, and I did not like his looks at all. "What are you going to do now?" he asked presently. "Going to stop here all night? You may, if you care."

"No. I'm off," I answered indifferently.

"This is not a very safe spot for such as you. Shall I walk with you?" He could control his face, but his eyes betrayed him.

"I can take pretty good care of myself, thank you."

"Oh, yes, I forgot. You've got the police close

by." He did not believe that story of mine, I saw, and he meant to make trouble.

I have always found that the surest way to deal with men of his class is to outbluff them when they are most confident. I did it now.

"No, I haven't any police. I came here single-handed."

His start at this was easy reading.

"Did you? Well, you took a big risk." He lowered his head as he spoke, so that I should not see his face.

"Then I'll accept your ofier to see me a bit on my way."

He looked up in great astonishment, as if he could scarcely believe his luck. But his expression changed a second later and he began to wonder what card I had up my sleeve.

I smiled. "You've reason for that doubt, Scharkoff. You needn't think I'm such a fool as not to know that you mean to raise hell for me the moment I'm outside your door. You can do that if you like; but before you try it, remember that I can do more than level a pistol. I can shoot straight and quick, and can aim just as certainly from inside my pocket as when I level it openly at your head. You'll walk just a pace or two ahead of me; and if you try any tricks I swear I'll shoot you like a dog," and I gave him another sample of my oathing capacity. "Now get a move on, sharp."

"I wasn't even thinking of it," he muttered shamefacedly.

"Don't waste time in lying. Start," and I opened the door.

His former fear stood me in good stead now. He shambled out of the room and I followed close at his heels. There was one flight of stairs to the house door and at the half-landing he glanced round and saw that my weapon was covering him. Fortunately, the passage was clear of people, and the front door stood open. I could hear men's voices in the rooms we passed. A sound from him and they would be at my heels like a pack of wolves hungry for blood.

In the passage he hesitated. "Go on," I growled. He obeyed and we reached the street. It was late now, and there were very few people about, A few night birds were stealing out to plunder, or seeking shelter after the ill-doings of the last hour or two; and most of them were as careful to avoid us, as I was anxious that they should.

Now and then one or two, either more reckless than the others, or recognising my companion, gave him a word or sign of greeting, and at those moments I closed up the distance between us until I almost trod on his heels.

It was a strange walk and not soothing to the nerves, but Scharkoff had convinced himself that I should shoot him at the first sign of mischief, and he made no attempt at treachery. And as soon as we reached the limits of the thieves' quarter, I sent him back and hurried on alone.

I had scored a genuine success, and had done it without Scharkoff having any idea that I was the man he had struck down and helped to rob. I was too tired that night to think how to use the fruits

of the victory, however, and tumbled into bed as soon as I reached my room.

The next morning I felt very confident. I knew that Kaspar had the diary and I could trust myself to get it from him. I should have to be cautious. I could not accuse him openly of anything, because the diary in such a case would fall into the hands of the police. And that was what he wanted.

But he had a lot of the coward in him and I reckoned that I could get it from him by force, if I could find out where he kept it. He had visited my office to see where I kept it while it was in my possession; and I could not do better than follow his lead and return his visit.

The thing had to be done at once, of course, and I was considering the difficulties to be overcome when the telephone rang.

"I want Mr. Enderby, quick!" said a voice.

"Well, you've got him. What is it?"

"This is Peterson. I'm at Mademoiselle Kasslov's. Come round at once. There's great news. I've got the whole story of the murder."

"Got what!" I exclaimed excitedly.

"It's true. Don't waste time at the 'phone. Come round. Everything's cleared up. Be quick!"

"But tell me the pith of it. You've set me on fire, man."

There was no answer. I rang the bell furiously.

"Number, please?" It was the Exchange girl.

I growled something about a mistake, hung up the receiver, grabbed my hat, and was rushing out when the police agent, Grovski, blocked me in the doorway.

"I wish to speak to you very particularly, Mr. Enderby," he said.

"I can't stop now, Grovski. I'm in a deuce of a hurry."

"I'm sorry to have to insist, but my orders are from headquarters and are imperative; otherwise I must ask you to accompany me there."

"Do you mean you are going to arrest me?" I cried indignantly.

He shrugged his shoulders and spread out his hands with a suggestion of apology, but at the same time held his place doggedly and would not let me pass.

CHAPTER X.

A CONFESSION.

A MOMENT'S consideration sufficed to convince me that the shortest way would be to hear what Grovski had to say; so I sat down, waved him to a chair, and curbed my impatience as best I could.

He had come to question me about my not having told the police about Dr. Busch's statement to me on the night of the murder, and to try and get me to say all I knew. He was irritated by my refusal, and went so far as to suggest that, as we used poisons in connection with our patent, they might have been obtained from me and that an explanation would have to be given.

I laughed at the thing as ridiculous; but he was very serious, and we had a pretty hot wrangle for some minutes.

"Look here, Grovski," I said at length. "You don't in the least understand my position. There are many things I should like to tell you, not as a police agent but as a friend; but if you are going to try and scare me with talk about headquarters and all the rest of it, you'll draw a blank. There isn't a man in Russia keener than I am to find out

the truth; and I'm ready to do anything, give any time, and spend any amount of money to get it; but I'm not a Russian subject, and I refuse point-blank to be questioned by your people except on my own terms."

He sat thinking a moment. His eyes had lighted at the mention of money, and the idea occurred to me that I might be able to play on his greed. "Will you come with me to M. Bertloff at headquarters?" he asked at length.

"Not unless you arrest me," I replied, with a grin.

"What do you mean when you say you are willing to spend money in this way?" was the next question.

"I don't mind that sort of question, of course," I said lightly. "For instance, it might be worth thousands of roubles to me to have a friend in your body, a man who would work loyally with me, I mean. I'm a rich enough man, you know, Grovski, for a few thousand roubles to be of very small account to me," I added.

He kept his face lowered as I spoke, and when he looked up, after a pause, our eyes met, and I saw that he understood. "I'll see you again, Mr. Enderby," he said, as he rose. "Of course, I myself should be only too glad to be of any service to you. And, at any rate, I can set this particular matter right."

"We'll shake hands on that, and you can think over what I've said," I replied; and his look convinced me that the seed was planted in good soil.

I hurried at once to answer Peterson's summons, and was surprised to find Fedora closeted with Alma and him.

Peterson noticed my glance of astonishment. "It's all right, Enderby. It is Fedora who has revealed everything; and it makes a very strange and very terrible story. She has confessed that she herself committed the murder."

"Fedora!" I exclaimed, in profound astonishment.

"At the instigation and with the help of one other person, Count Kaspar," continued Peterson. "You remember my surmise that there was a plot to kill both the General and Mademoiselle Kasslov. That was so; and only the accident that they were surprised and took alarm prevented the double tragedy."

Alma was trembling and was intensely agitated, but Fedora met my look of horror and loathing with a hard, defiant expression.

"Tell me," I said, after a pause.

"Count Kaspar has always had great influence over her—knowing some secret in her past which he threatened to reveal; she will not state what that was; and gradually he exerted it, getting her more and more into his power, until he began to suggest this deed. He has been in desperate straits for money for a long time; he is in debt to an enormous extent; and was at his wits' end to know how to stave off his creditors. He applied to his uncle for help, and it was refused; their quarrel on that occasion being especially violent. They were always quarrelling, in fact; and being cornered in this way, he devised the scheme of killing his uncle and mademoiselle at the same time—putting the crime on the shoulders of the Terrorists by means of the dagger which was found in the body after death."

"Devilish." I muttered, as he paused.

"He made arrangements to prove his absence from Moscow on the night of the murder. He went to Orel; but he returned ——"

"I met him in the street that night," I broke in.

Fedora started and nodded.

"Well, he got this girl so completely dominated that she consented to act with him. He procured some poison and entrusted it to her ——"

"Ah, that poison label I found in her room? Another confirmation," I interposed.

"What was that?" asked Fedora, bending forward eagerly.

"You had the poison in a bottle, the label of which you took off and thought no doubt you had destroyed. But I found part of it."

"Yes. It was from the bottle he gave me. He ordered me to do it. And he made me put some of it in a scent bottle of mademoiselle's." She made this revolting admission with a callous frankness, almost as if suggesting that her present candour palliated her own share in the matter.

"Then, mark this," said Peterson. "He knew all about the administration by means of the hypodermic needle—he is an opium fiend; and he actually trained this girl for the murder by teaching her how to inject morphia into his arm."

"It is true, monsieur. I have done it many times. Oh, very many," she declared.

"She met him by appointment on the night and let him into the house secretly. Together they went up to the General's room. She entered first, pretending to take a message from her mistress, and while she was talking to him, Kaspar got inside.

At a signal from her, he rushed forward, clapped a handkerchief over the victim's mouth to prevent him from crying out, and then held him while she plunged the needle into his wrist."

At this point of the story Alma's hands tightened spasmodically on my arm, she trembled like an aspen, and her breath was laboured and quick.

Fedora, on the other hand, was cold, unmoved, callous, and defiant, as if, indeed, she gloried in the crime thus recounted.

"And the mutilation of the dead man?" I asked, with a shudder.

Fedora herself took up the telling. "That was his work," she said. "I had left the room. I had gone indeed to see where my mistress was. He made me go, for he meant to complete everything. When I went back, I was horrified at what he had done. 'Why have you done that?' I asked, in fear. He pointed to the dagger which he had thrust into the dead body—the dagger with the message from the Terrorists which was found, monsieur. 'It is the way those men work,' he replied. 'It will prove this to be their doing.' I could not bear to look at it, and turned away and hid my face. He was furious with me for this, and struck me. He was like a madman, monsieur. And I was afraid he would kill me, too, if I did not do what he ordered. He told me to take him at once to the room where mademoiselle was. I refused at first. My heart smote me, and I tried to run away, but he seized me and threatened me. I fell on my knees, declaring that the horrors were enough for that one night. He vowed then that he would swear he had caught me

red-handed and denounce me to the police as the murderer. Still I would not, and held to him and wrestled to prevent him from leaving the room. And in the midst of it all, we heard footsteps. Oh, that moment!" and she closed her eyes with a shudder of horror at the recollection.

"Go on," I said, after a pause.

"We had just time to rush into the next room and hide, and then Eikov and another man came along the passage and, after hesitating at the door, they entered. What followed, I do not know. We hurried away. I got my companion out of the house and went to my own room. I waited and waited and waited, in fear and trembling, and presently stole out to see why no alarm had been raised. I found mademoiselle at the door of her father's room, and then I told the tale about my being ill. I am sure I looked it, and felt it, too. My legs would scarcely hold up my body. I got her away from the door back to her own rooms, and waited again for what was to happen. Then it occurred to me about the poison I had put in the green scent bottle. Oh, my God, my God, I shall never forget the terror of that remembrance!"

Again she paused, in shuddering horror.

"It was in the bureau, and while my mistress was there I could not get it. I went to her, therefore, and said that the door of her father's room was open. The discovery followed, but still I could not recover that poison. I waited again in an agony of fear, and when at last I knew she had gone to bed and I thought the room was empty, I crept there—only to find it gone. I have not had a

moment's peace since that discovery. It has been torture, torture, torture, every hour, every minute of the time. Nothing but torture, until it has grown unbearable. I would sooner be dead than endure it for another day. And so I have told the truth."

Her manner was again resolute, self-possessed, clear, without a trace or sign of regret or remorse. That she was highly wrought under the assumption of coolness, I believed, but whatever her feelings might be, they were certainly entirely unconnected with repentance.

There was a long pause when she had finished, and Alma sank back in her seat, and covered her face in her hands. She was profoundly moved, as she might well be indeed, considering the vile ingratitude and deadly treachery of the girl she had treated so kindly and trusted so fully.

"You have counted the cost of this confession, of course," I said, breaking the pause.

"I am ready to die. I know that I am not fit to live after this. I have been so wicked, so deceitful, so evil. I am ready to die."

"Then there is nothing to do but to send for the police," I said.

But Peterson drew me aside then to say that Fedora's evidence against the Count would need to be corroborated in some way, and that Alma was against an open accusation. "She wants to contrive in some way that he shall be allowed to escape, because of the disgrace to the family," he explained.

But the difficulty was that unless he were convicted, Alma herself would not be cleared of suspicion; and I put this to her.

"It would be the same thing if he could be

induced to leave a confession behind him," suggested Alma, as we three discussed it together.

"Yes. If?" smiled Peterson.

"I'm not so sure it couldn't be done," I replied, and told them of my experience in the Riverside quarter with Scharkoff and about Kaspar's share in the attack on me. "At any rate, I could see him to-night and make the attempt."

He agreed at length that I should do this; and, having explained to Fedora the need for some corroboration of her statement, questioned her at great length to see where the story could be confirmed in the details.

Her rage against Kaspar amounted to a frenzy, and her eyes flashed vindictively at every mention of his name. "He shall die for this murder," she cried more than once. "I will not suffer alone. He has made my life a hell."

It was this thirst for revenge which had driven her to confess; and I found myself speculating curiously as to what he had done to rouse her to this wild, fierce passion. Had the love passages between them anything to do with it? The question started some disquieting thoughts, but I reflected that her motive did not matter. We had the truth; Alma would be freed from all trouble, and nothing else counted.

After we had made the necessary arrangements in regard to Fedora, I had an hour alone with Alma, the happiest we had spent for some days. I told her all about my interview with Baron Vodolski, and how in my depression at the result I had been afraid to see her; and together we rejoiced at the fortunate turn which matters had now taken.

She was very confident that her cousin would make a confession, and when we parted her last words were to urge me to make him realise that his only chance of escape was to fly the country. "You will help him to get away, Paul, won't you? The disgrace to our family would be such humiliation."

"You must be careful not to let Fedora get so much as a suspicion that we mean to let him escape. You saw how vindictive she was."

"I can't conceive what has turned her against him so."

"We needn't trouble about that; but I believe she would even go so far as to recall her confession, if she knew what we meant to do. It's easy to understand she would be mad at having to suffer the consequences alone."

"She will not have to suffer, Paul. When it is once known that Kaspar has confessed and fled, there will be many people ready to have the affair dealt with secretly."

But I was very far from sharing Alma's belief that her cousin would be willing to make a confession. It was much more probable that the truth would have to be wrung out of him by very drastic methods, and a possible means of doing this had occurred to me.

He had a weakness on which I could play, and I spent a long time thinking out the means of attack. But when the time came for me to start for his house I was doubtful about the result.

The responsibility was one of the heaviest I had ever carried; for on the success or failure of my errand depended the safety and perhaps the life of the woman I loved.

CHAPTER XI.

AN EXPERIMENT IN MORPHIA.

COUNT KASPAR was out when I reached his house, and it was more than an hour before he came in. The fact that I should have waited so long was of itself sufficient to rouse some suspicion of my purpose, and I read something of this in his look as he entered.

"Ah, friend Englishman, a visit from you, eh? One of the last compliments I looked for," he said, with an attempt at his customary jauntiness. "Sorry you should have had to wait so long."

"You'll have gathered that it's rather important. I have a proposition to put to you which you may find interesting."

"Come into my own particular then, as I call my den"; and he led the way to a room which was evidently that which he generally used, and he brought out cigars and drinks.

I was glad to see that he was fagged out and wore that harassed, drawn look which morphia victims have when the fever is on them.

"You'll join me?" I asked, as I lit a cigar.

"Directly. But you know my little weakness,

don't you? I'll have a pick-me-up first," he replied, and with a half shame-faced, half-bravado air he drew a needle syringe from his pocket and turned to his table for a phial of morphia.

This was just what I wanted, and I assumed a sort of professional interest in the drug. "I'm something of an expert on morphia, and your Russian stuff is generally very bad," I said, holding out my hand for the bottle.

Without a thought of my purpose he gave it me, and I smelt it and shook my head. "Vile stuff. You shouldn't touch such rubbish."

"It satisfies me," he replied, reaching out his hand for it.

I sniffed it again, made a wry face, and let the bottle drop, and in a pretended effort to catch it, shook the contents out and then swore at myself for my clumsiness.

He had no idea that I had done it intentionally, and the nervous, eager disappointment in his eyes, as he saw the stuff spilt, told me plainly that the craving for it was strong upon him.

I made a profuse apology, and when I learnt with intense satisfaction that he had no more in the house, I offered to send to Crossley for some. "It shall be very different from anything you have ever had," I said, as I wrote a note to Crossley and enclosed one for Peterson. I told the former to detain the servant and send for Peterson, and asked the latter to prevent the man's return; and I sealed the letter on the pretext that we were not supposed to let anything of the sort leave our hands.

Kaspar was now in the throes of a bad morphia

craving, and I knew that the want of it would soon put him at my mercy.

"He'll be back in half an hour or so," I said, "and in the meantime we can talk." And talk I did, in a rambling, long-winded fashion about my leaving Moscow and the position of matters generally, involving my words intentionally so that if his faculties had been in a normal condition, he would have had difficulty in following me.

The half-hour lengthened into an hour, and the hour into two hours, until he was positively crazy for the drug. "You'll drive me mad," he cried, at length. "I don't know what the devil you're driving at."

I meandered on in the same inconsequent fashion, until he could stand it no longer. "I must ask you to go. I've been trying to understand you, but my wits are so muddled I can't make out what you want. I feel fit to cut my throat in this state." He looked it, too. His face was drawn and haggard, his eyes bloodshot, and his lips were twitching spasmodically. His might have aged ten years in the last two hours. The crisis had come, and I could act.

"I'll tell you in a sentence what I've come for. I want that diary."

He flinched from the sharply-spoken words as if I had struck him. "I don't understand you," he murmured, trying to force a sneer to his nerveless, livid lips.

"Lies won't help you," I replied sternly. "You and your accomplice, Scharkoff, robbed me, and you'll give it back to me now. But there's much more

than that. Your other accomplice, Fedora Douroff, has confessed everything about your part in your uncle's murder. To-morrow she will be in the hands of the police, and they will know the whole story. Your cousin will be merciful, however, and you can have a chance to fly the country. Write a confession and I'll help you to get away."

"I have nothing to confess," he cried, with more energy than I had expected, and he sprang to his feet.

I drew my revolver then, and took out a bottle of morphia I had brought in readiness for this moment. "Your servant is not coming back. That note I wrote was for him to be detained. I spilt your morphia on purpose, and have brought this with me. The price of it is —the diary."

This had all the effect I had anticipated. He stared at it like a man bereft of his senses; thrust out his hand to grasp it, and when I withdrew it out of his reach he fell back into his chair with a groan of agony.

The next two hours were among the most trying of my life. Wild ravings and curses were interspersed with abject prayers and tears. At one moment I had to hold him back at the point of my weapon; the next he would grovel on the floor, rending the air with his cries and entreaties; for minutes together he lay like a log, motionless, inert, dead to everything but the mad craving which possessed him; at other times he groaned and tore his hair as a paroxysm seized him, or sat staring at me, his eyes glowing like those of a wild beast at bay.

It was midnight when the end came. Heedless of

my levelled pistol he sprang at me to get his hands on my throat, but I met the attack with a blow with my fist, and he went down and lay in a heap, groaning and beaten. He struggled to his feet after a time—a mere wreck of a human being—his eyes fixed on the bottle.

"Give it me, only give it me, and I'll do anything," he murmured, in broken, unsteady tones.

The fight was over. It had been hard and terrible to witness while it lasted. But I had won, and with a deep sigh of relief I rose and told him to go to his desk and write the confession and give me the diary.

With infinite labour and many pauses he succeeded in scrawling a few lines, much of it at my dictation, and signed his name to it. But he could not find the diary, protesting with vows that he had forgotten where it was, and begging for the drug to stir his benumbed senses. And when I refused it, he pulled out drawer after drawer of the desk and scattered the contents over the floor. "Do you know how you're torturing me?" he moaned.

"You are torturing yourself now. Not a drop of this till you find it," I declared, holding up the phial.

A cry of sheer anguish broke from him and, letting his head fall on his arms, he burst into a passionate flood of sobs, his whole body heaving and rocking convulsively with the stress of his despair.

In the midst of this storm of grief he threw himself suddenly on his knees before me. "Kill me. Shoot me. For God's sake, kill me. I can't endure it."

Nor could I longer endure the sight of his agony, so I wrote rapidly the confession he had made.

"Write here at the foot—'I declare this to be true,' —and sign it." He wrote as I dictated and added his signature.

Never while I live shall I forget his look as he seized the phial of his beloved drug, gloating over it as a miser over his gold. After he had administered it, he crawled to the sofa and lay there until it had had time to take effect.

"Good heavens, what a mess I've made of things!" he exclaimed at length with a deep sigh; and he rose and walked about the room, waving his hands despairingly. "I'll make a clean breast of things, Enderby. Shall I write that paper out in my own hand? Steady enough to shoot myself, if need be. But I shan't do that."

He sat down at the desk and re-wrote the confession in a firm hand, signed it, and handed it to me. "Will that do?"

I ran my eye over it and nodded. "And now the diary," I said.

"I'll get it. But what about my getting away? What's the time? Can I catch the mail?" He took out his watch. "It's stopped," he said with an oath. "You'll let me have some money?"

He had acted so well that I had not a suspicion of his intention. I pulled out my watch and the next instant he had wrenched my revolver away and stepped back, levelling it at me, with a grin of triumph. "This is going to be my show now, friend Englishman. Keep quiet, and you shall get away all right. I don't want to shoot you here, but I shall, if you try any foolery. Just get back a bit, to the

other side of that table and I'll show you what a confounded ass you've made of yourself."

It's cold work arguing with a man at the right end of a revolver levelled dead at you. So I moved back. "Well?" I asked curtly.

"I'm glad to see you take it sensibly," he sneered. "Don't think I shan't get even with you for this night's work. I shall, right enough, but not by putting a bullet into you now, unless you force me. Cheer up! Look pleasant. You've had your fun so far, try to enjoy mine," and he continued to jibe at me in this way until my blood boiled in humiliation.

"Now for the truth, my valiant Englishman. You've got my confession there, and you're welcome to it. For all I care, you can go and shout it all over the city or do whatever you please with it. That cat of hell, Fedora, has taken you in with her lies. Think that over in that capacious English brain of yours.

"Like it?" he jeered, after a pause. "I had to use her for certain purposes and promised to marry her, and she is ugly enough to believe it. When your lawyer friend frightened her out of the house she came to me to keep the promise and, having no further use for her, I told her to go where she will certainly go one of these days. She vowed to be revenged, and this bogus confession is the result—accusing even herself in order to punish me. Some women will do these things and she's evidently one of them."

I recalled my former doubts about Fedora's motive, seeing how they fitted with what he said, and they made me profoundly uneasy.

"So much for the precious murder story. Here's something else for those brilliant brains of yours. You are right about my having paid that visit to your office the other night. I went for what I got—the diary. Ah, that touches you, eh? Want to say anything about it?"

I let the jibe pass unnoticed.

"And now, my virtuous Englishman, I'm going to show you what you've done by this night's work. Anyone who studies that diary is not likely to have many doubts left about my pretty delicate cousin having had a hand in killing her brute of a father. You ought to be ashamed of yourself for trying to baulk justice in this way! I am positively shocked at you! I feel that it is my painful duty to put that evidence into the hands of the police and leave her to clear herself—if she can."

"You infernal scoundrel!" I burst out furiously.

"Ah, you find it a relief to lose your temper. Good. It pleases me, and it won't do Alma any good. As a matter of fact, I got that diary with the object of selling it back to you, but to-night's business has made me change my mind. I won't be hard on my dear cousin. I'll be just as merciful as she was to me. She shall leave the country instead of me. I'll give her three days, and, mark this, for I mean every syllable of it. If she is in the city at the end of that time, the diary will be in the hands of the police with a nice little note to the effect that you had it in your possession for a considerable time. And that won't exactly be pleasant even for such a brainy Anglo-Saxon as you. But you've made the bed, and mustn't grumble if you find the

sheets crumpled. Now I've done with you, and you can go," he said contemptuously.

Bitterly chagrined, humiliated, and furiously angry at the blundering mess I had made of my opportunity, I hesitated a moment or two whether to make a final struggle to repair the disaster, and glanced up, measuring the distance between us and calculating the chances of being able to reach him without being shot. I resolved to risk it, and rose.

He caught the glance and interpreted it aright. "You'd better not try any tricks," he said sharply. "I'm a dead shot at a longer distance than this."

"What sum will you take for the diary?" I asked, as if about to parley.

But he read my intention. Quick as lightning he snatched up a book from his desk and flung it at me, and as I avoided it he rushed out of the room, slamming the door behind him.

I darted after him, only to find him at the head of the stairway. "You can come up if you dare, but you won't reach the top alive," he called.

He was right. The chances were too slight to warrant the attempt, and swallowing my bitter mortification as best I could, I accepted the defeat and left the house.

CHAPTER XII.

AS IMPENETRABLE AS EVER.

As I hurried from Count Kaspar's house I was miserable and dejected enough to have satisfied even his vindictive spleen. I had ruined everything, and plunged Alma into far greater danger than ever. I could not face Peterson in such a mood, so I went home and tumbled into bed.

A night's rest, with at most a couple of hours of troubled broken sleep, did very little except to make the difficulties of the position clearer than before and convince me that there was but one thing left—flight.

The mystery of the General's death seemed darker than ever; for I could not believe that if Kaspar were really guilty he would not have jumped at the opportunity of getting away which I had offered him. And yet, the moment I reached Alma's house Peterson met me with an excited declaration that Kaspar's servant had made a statement proving Kaspar's guilt up to the hilt.

"Borodak's his name," he said, in a jubilant tone. "He admits he knew all about his master's share in the affair. It was a splendid stroke your sending him here."

"Wait a bit, till you hear what happened last night," I replied, dolefully, and told how I had been checkmated.

"You needn't worry about that. This servant's evidence would hang him if he were a prince of the blood royal. He admits he was in the house with his master; he helped in all the arrangements for that pretended trip to Orel; knows where he got the poison, and all the rest of it. In a word, the thing's as clear as it could possibly be."

"What does he know about Fedora?"

"Nothing, except that they were mixed up together. He does not know how the thing was actually done. But the girl's statement supplies all that's wanted about that."

"Well, I hope it's all right," I said dejectedly. "But for my part, the sooner I'm out of this confounded Moscow the better."

"Don't look so grumpy, man, when everything's going our way," cried my friend, with a laugh.

"I don't believe we've got the right end of the stick yet, or that we shall ever know the truth about the infernal thing. What are you going to do?"

"I'll bring Borodak here, and you can have a word with him until the police arrive."

I took an instinctive dislike to the man the instant he came into the room. He was between forty and fifty, his beard and hair were tinged with grey, tinted glasses concealed his eyes, there was a furtive look about him that inspired distrust, and both walk and carriage suggested the prison taint.

"This is Mr. Enderby, and he has obtained a

confession from your master," said Peterson, as they entered.

He was obviously very much astonished to hear this. "It will save a lot of trouble," he muttered, after a pause.

"Scarcely, for he contradicted it afterwards; but we're going to put it in the hands of the police and, of course, you'll stand by all you told me?"

"If it's necessary, yes," he replied, not at all relishing the mention of the police.

"You'd rather not go near them, eh?" I interjected sharply.

"I know what they are," he said slowly. "If I were to go to them before they had made up their minds that the Count was guilty, they'd probably arrest me. I've suffered enough from them as it is," he added wearily.

"Well, we can see them without you at first," said Peterson, and sent him out of the room again.

"I don't like his looks, Peterson. He's an old gaolbird."

"I don't care if he's old Nick, so long as he sticks to his story."

The police agent, Grovski, arrived a few minutes later, and with him was one of his superiors, M. Bertloff, whom Peterson knew well.

"We've solved the mystery of General Kasslov's death for you, Bertloff," said my friend jubilantly.

"That is news, indeed," replied M. Bertloff, a very different stamp of man from Grovski, very courteous in manner and with a singularly pleasant voice. He listened intently to the story which Peterson told, and taking the confession which Kaspar had

written, scrutinised it carefully for two or three minutes.

"And is that all you have to tell me?" he asked at length.

"About enough to satisfy you for the time, isn't it?" replied Peterson.

"And you, Mr. Enderby? Have you anything more you would wish to say?"

"I don't think so." I didn't like his quietly suggestive tone.

"About any others who might have been suspected, I mean, for one thing."

"No. I can't see that you need much more."

"You had the girl's statement yesterday afternoon and, of course, had some reason for not communicating with us at once?"

"We wished to get, what we have got, confirmation," replied Peterson.

"And meanwhile have allowed Count Kaspar to leave the city. You will appreciate the seriousness of that unfortunate fact? Is it perhaps the case that you intentionally gave him an opportunity of leaving?"

I did not know how to reply. It was evident that he possessed more information than we knew; and I began to be extremely uncomfortable under his suave manner and penetrating eyes. Peterson came to my rescue.

"Such things have been done before now in the case of members of distinguished families, Bertloff," he said.

"Shall I take that as the answer to my question; Mr. Enderby?"

"I'm afraid I must leave you to draw what conclusion you wish," I replied.

"Seeing that you have deemed it prudent to reserve so much vital information about this matter, I will do so. But I suggest that it would be much more satisfactory to all concerned if you were to be very frank."

"My dear Bertloff, you're surely not going to regard us as suspects because we have chosen our own methods to get these facts for you," protested Peterson, with a smile.

"I should not regard you as suspect for a moment," was the reply, with just a shade of emphasis on the pronoun, as if to draw a distinction between the two of us. "Is this girl Douroff here? I had better see her."

Peterson fetched Fedora, and M. Bertloff questioned her at great length; she held to her story, but was very restive under his probing pressure for details. He endeavoured to lead her to contradict herself, and made so much of even trifling inconsistencies that I saw he did not believe her. This confirmed my previous impression that he knew much more than we had believed, and that this secret information was inspiring his cross-examination.

Most disquieting of all was the quiet pertinacity with which he followed up every mention of Alma, and every reference to the fact that there had been poison in the house.

When the investigation was over he sent her away in charge of Grovski, thanked us very suavely for what we had done, and asked Peterson to fetch Borodak.

"I should like you to consider carefully whether you had not better tell us everything you know, Mr. Enderby," he said, while Peterson was away. "It will really be to the best interests of all concerned, even of those whom you may think you are shielding by your silence."

"Why do you think I am concealing anything?" I asked in reply.

"I draw my conclusions, but it must be as you decide," he answered, with a wave of the hands.

"I am willing to answer any questions, M. Bertloff."

He thought for a moment, and was about to speak when we were interrupted by a noise outside the room, and old Ivan, following Peterson and Borodak, rushed in crying excitedly: "This is the murderer, Mr. Enderby! He is Paul Palutin, the villain who murdered my master. I charge him with it."

"Not so fast, you," said Bertloff to Ivan. "He will not escape. I have taken ample precautions against anything of that sort."

As he spoke, Grovski returned and I saw that two or three police agents were standing near the door. "Now, tell me quietly what you mean," said Bertloff, in his smooth, calm tone, when the hubbub had ceased.

Ivan repeated all that he had formerly told me about Paul Palutin, and, after a question or two, was sent away. "Where is Count Kaspar's servant?" asked Bertloff of Peterson.

"This is the man. He gave me his name as Borodak."

With a slight but significant lift of the brows,

Bertloff turned to the man. "Of course, I know you as the ex-convict, Palutin. What have you to say? Were you in this house on the night of General Kasslov's death?"

"Yes. His servant Eikov brought me here by the General's orders. I have nothing to hide. Years ago he cheated me of all I had in the world, and then had me imprisoned on a false charge. I wrote to him, demanding restitution, and he promised to make it, and sent for me. I meant to take his life, but he was too quick for me with his revolver and drove me out of the room."

"You say he was alive when you left the room?" asked Bertloff, fastening at once on the discrepancy between this statement and Fedora's.

"Yes. Eikov knows that and can prove it. But you can do what you like with me. He's dead, thank God, and that's all I care about. My only regret is that mine was not the hand to kill him," he cried vindictively.

"And the statement you made to Mr. Peterson. How much of that is true?"

"Nothing, except that I entered Count Kaspar's service in order to get access to this house, and that the Count was in the city that night, and had arranged so that everyone should believe him to be at Orel."

"Then you're an infernal scoundrel!" cried Peterson excitedly. "And deserve all that's coming to you."

"If you had suffered a tenth part of what that old villain made me suffer, you'd have done what I was ready to do that night. Rot him!" The hatred

and malice in his tone and look were indescribable. The sufferings of years seemed to be concentrated in the ferocity and vindictiveness of that one utterance.

Bertloff raised a protesting hand. "The case is very black on your own showing, Palutin. You admit that you meant to kill the General, that you had threatened him, and that you were in the house on the night of the murder. Why do you stop short there in the confession?"

"Because it's the truth. Eikov knows that his master was alive when I left the house, and can prove it."

"You shall have such chance as there may be of proving your innocence."

"Are you going to arrest me?"

"Certainly"; and Grovski and a couple of men took the man away. "What do you make of this now, Mr. Peterson?" asked Bertloff, as the door closed behind them.

"I don't believe that man did it."

"You would if you knew his record. His statement amounts to a virtual confession. Nothing less."

"That makes two confessions then; for the statement goes a long way to confirm what the girl said about Count Kaspar's movements."

"The General could scarcely have been murdered twice, could he?"

"That's about what you'll have to prove before you can bring it home to Palutin," retorted Peterson, stung by Bertloff's covert sneer.

"There are many other things which will have to

be proved and cleared up before this matter is ended," replied Bertloff, with quiet significance. "I am much mistaken if Mr. Enderby here could not help us materially if he were so inclined. Is not that so?" he asked, turning to me.

"I told you just now that I would answer any questions you wish to put."

He paused, and then shook his head. "I think it will be better for me to deliver a message which Baron Vodolski entrusted to me for you. It is that you see him at once."

"I have no objection to see him as soon as we have threshed out the turn which matters have taken here."

"I said at once, Mr. Enderby. It will be best for you to go immediately."

"Indeed," I replied, taking umbrage at the imperative note in his voice.

"Do I understand that you decline to obey his summons? You do not appear to appreciate fully the gravity of your own position in all this."

"What I do appreciate fully is the unpleasant suggestiveness of your manner," I rapped back sharply.

"I have no wish to be unpleasant, but the matter is official and urgent, and if you refuse to go I must report the fact to his Excellency forthwith. There are many developments and facts, affecting you closely, which you must explain."

"If you mean to threaten me, M. Bertloff, carry out your threat to the end and arrest me," I cried angrily.

"That is a step which I am instructed to leave

to his Excellency's decision. Otherwise——" He left the sentence unfinished with a slight lift of the hands, a gesture disquietingly easy to understand.

"I am not afraid of arrest, sir," I declared, with no little indignation.

"I think I should go, Enderby," interposed Peterson.

"All right," I replied, and bottling up my anger I left the room at once. Judging by Bertloff's manner and words there was no doubt that the interview was to be anything but a friendly one, and that it was extremely likely to result in disaster.

If I refused to admit all I knew, I should probably be arrested; while if I did admit it, the woman I loved would be imprisoned.

And this was the outcome of what we had believed to be the solution of the whole mystery.

CHAPTER XIII.

BARON VODOLSKI'S WARNING.

THE moment I entered Baron Vodolski's room I could see by his looks that Bertloff had not underestimated the importance of the summons. He was busily occupied with some documents, which he covered over with a paper as he gave me a sharp look and offered me his hand.

"I am able to shake hands with you as a friend, Mr. Enderby, at the opening of this interview, and I hope we shall part on the same terms," he said ominously.

"I trust so. I can assure you, I know of no reason to the contrary," I replied, taking the chair by his side to which he pointed.

"I had hoped that you would have taken my hint and have left Moscow."

"I shall not do that, whatever happens, sir. I am quite resolved."

"I won't accept that statement for the moment. The way is still open to you, but I warn you that if you persist in refusing, you may find the frontier closed, with results which may prove exceedingly serious I am speaking very earnestly."

His solicitude was obviously sincere. "Believe me, sir, I thank you with all my heart for your words, but I am not afraid to face the consequences of anything I have done. And, indeed, there is less reason than ever, in my opinion, for me to run away. I cannot go, therefore."

"You say there is 'less' reason?"

"I am remaining in Moscow to watch the interests of the woman I love, Mademoiselle Kasslov. I have been doing my utmost to discover the facts which will clear up the mystery of her father's death, and thus put an end to the suspicions so unjustly entertained about her. I believe that the truth has already been discovered, and that the murderer is known."

"Who is the assassin, do you think?"

"Either her cousin or a man named Paul Palutin."

"Either?" he repeated, catching at the word.

"I will tell you what has just occurred"; and I described the recent interview with Palutin.

He shook his head ominously. Then from a drawer he took out the fateful diary. "You know this?"

"It was for a time in my possession and was stolen from me with violence by Count Kaspar, and has no doubt been given to you by him."

"You went to the Count's house last night. Tell me freely, why?"

I did so unreservedly. I explained Alma's wish that her cousin should have a chance to escape, and described all that had passed.

"You are very indiscreet. Indiscreet, indeed, is a feeble term for such conduct. It was wrong in every sense," he said sternly.

"I am in your hands, but if the circumstances were to repeat themselves, I should do the same thing again."

"You are a child in this girl's hands," he exclaimed angrily. I let the remark pass, and he then asked: "What else have you done in her interest, as you term it?"

"I think the time has come when I should tell you everything"; and I gave him a clear account of everything, including even my discovery of the poison and the needle syringe. Everything.

His face darkened as I spoke, and when I finished, he cried sternly: "And you mean you cannot draw the inference to which all this most certainly points? You cannot see this girl's guilt?" and he shook the diary at me.

"If there is one thing of which I am absolutely convinced, it is of her absolute innocence, Baron Vodolski."

"Well, you will have to prove it. Do you know that the pen was actually in my hand this morning to order her arrest?"

"It would have been a cruel injustice and a crying wrong," I declared, with great heat.

"Strong words, Mr. Enderby, even from an infatuated and purblind young man in love."

A hot retort sprang to my lips, but I had sufficient prudence to restrain it. "I believe her to be incapable of even a thought of wrong," I replied.

"The case is very black; very black indeed, although you cannot judge it." He paused to think, and then added: "You have been frank with me. I see that. And I will be frank with you. A remark-

able development has occurred, and that alone has prevented the order being signed. I have received a special report from the doctors who examined the late General's body after Dr. Busch."

"I care nothing for what they have reported," I exclaimed impulsively.

"Yet you have great reason to care; for it has added to the confusion and extreme uncertainty in which the case is enveloped. They declare now that the cause of death was not, as Dr. Busch asserted, poison, but the dagger thrust through the heart."

I could scarcely believe my ears. My delight was so intense that I could not conceal it. Indeed, there was no reason why I should. A disagreement among the doctors as to the actual cause of death went to the very root of things. Without positive proof on such a vital point, it was difficult to see how a charge could be made against anybody; and certainly while they remained convinced that death had not been due to poison, even a Russian tribunal could not convict Alma of having done the deed by that means.

The Baron sat watching me and was irritated by my manifest satisfaction.

"You are pleased at this," he said with a frown. "You think that it will help Mademoiselle Kasslov?"

"She does not need any such help, sir. She is innocent; no difference between the doctors is needed to prove that."

"You see also that it disposes of the charge against Count Kaspar?"

I started. I had overlooked that. "At any rate, he has lost no time in getting out of the way," I said.

"He explained that when sending me this diary. The charge is ridiculous, and he will return, if need be, to face it."

"He may say so; but you will remember that Fedora Douroff declares that he prepared the apparent proofs of the deed having been done by the Terrorists. That does not look like innocence."

"She has lied!" he exclaimed, with a testy motion of the hands.

"Well, this report of the doctors will remove all suspicion from Mademoiselle Kasslov?"

"By no means. It merely suggests that she may have employed other means. It is, of course, quite improbable that she acted alone in this."

"You are resolved to take the blackest view of her conduct."

"We are not all in love with her," he retorted drily. "I judge men and women by one standard —their acts, not their professions."

"I wish you would see her."

"To have my judgment warped by a pretty face or tearful eyes?"

"Oh, no. But to form your own opinion of her character."

"I have formed it. I do not entertain a shadow of a doubt that directly or indirectly her hand is in this. You do not share that opinion for the simple reason that you cannot. Your feeling for her prevents you. At your age I might have been as foolish as you—but I hope not." The last words were a sort of aside, a half-whisper of devout hope.

"What is the position, then?" I asked, after a pause.

"It is still unchanged. She is suspect."

"But surely in view of this medical opinion that is not fair?"

"What was your own statement a moment since about Count Kaspar. Did you absolve him because of it?"

It was a fair retort, and I had no answer. "The cases are different," I murmured.

"Because you dislike the man and love the woman," was the pointed reply. "And there is another consideration. What do you know of this young woman's dealings with the Young Russia Party? If these fools of doctors are right, the assassination is Terrorist work, of course. They are boasting loudly enough about it. But if that is the solution, where would they be more likely to look for help in their vile scheme than to someone of their number—inside the house?"

"Mademoiselle Kasslov has had no dealings with them other than such as her sympathy for helpless women and children, threatened by her father's harshness, led her to take for their protection."

"What claim to protection has the spawn of rebels and murderers?" he cried fiercely.

"I am an Englishman, Baron Vodolski; and in my country, thank God, we do not war on women, and we seek to save the children from the errors of their fathers."

"You would positively encourage her in her sedition, then?"

"She has not been guilty of any sedition, sir. And in any other country than this, all that she has done would be recognised for what it is—the work of a true and noble-minded woman."

"It is enough," he said bluntly. "I can only tell you that after what you have done in attempting to conceal so many vital matters—the discovery of the poison, of the means by which it could be administered, and then of this incriminating diary—you will have to hold yourself ready to answer for your conduct in thwarting the ends of justice."

"I am ready now," I replied hotly, as I rose. "I have not done anything of which an honest man need be ashamed, and if the despotic laws of this country of yours can construe what I have done as a crime, I will take the consequences"; and I turned to the door.

"Stay," he called, as I reached it. "You are hotter in the head than even your father was at your age. I don't wish to quarrel with you. I offered you the chance of leaving the country, but you would not take it. I can do no more except to warn you. If you are in the city longer than three days from now, you yourself will be suspect. If the mystery of this assassination is not cleared up by then, arrests will be made, and you will be among those arrested—for your part as an accessory after the fact. The thing will be altogether out of my hands."

"I am content to take my chance of that," I said.

His frown deepened as he continued. "Nor is that all. You are already known to have friends among the Young Russia Party. There is reason to suspect that you furnished funds by means of which one of them, who boasted of having been concerned in the assassination, made his escape. Acts like these cannot be overlooked. We are determined

to bring the deed home to one or other of the guilty parties, even if we sweep them all into prison with one cast of the net, and leave the process of the law to sift out the truth. Now go. Do not give me the hot answer I see trembling on your lips. Think it all over in cold blood. Take time, and act as I would have your father's son act."

"I will only ask one question. If I go, will Mademoiselle Kasslov be allowed to leave the country?"

His face grew black as a thunder-cloud. "Certainly not. We do not provide our murderesses with passports to facilitate their escape."

Choking back my anger at this, I went out and slammed the door behind me. But my anger was not greater than my alarm on Alma's account, if he carried out his threat—to arrest everyone suspected and leave them in prison while the police sifted the evidence against them.

The sifting process might take months, possibly even years, and I shuddered as I recalled some of the fearful stories I had heard of the treatment of women prisoners awaiting trial, and of the methods adopted to force them to confession. It was improbable that she would leave prison alive.

There was only the one alternative left to her—flight.

Peterson was still with her when I reached the house and very anxious to hear the result of my interview with Vodolski. The instant he had heard my report, I saw that he shared my view.

But Alma herself did not, at first. "There is one thing quite certain," she said to me, "you must not remain in Moscow."

"Nor you, either, mademoiselle," he declared earnestly.

"But to go now, Mr. Peterson, would be tantamount to admitting my guilt. You would not have me do that, surely?"

"I would not have you arrested," he replied, bluntly.

"But I could not go. Besides, it would be impossible."

"We'll deal with the possibility afterwards. I tell you frankly that it is your only chance. I know what this threat of Vodolski's means. It is an old trick of the police—to imprison everyone suspected, and then employ prison methods to get sufficient evidence to convict some one of them."

"I know," she murmured, with a shudder. "But I am afraid to go."

"You had much better be afraid to stay. Better be frightened half out of your wits than run the risks of an arrest."

"They would not dare to resort to such—to the methods you suggest in my case," she answered; but the pallor of her face and her trembling lips showed the slightness of her belief in her own words.

"I know a great deal about the inside working of your prisons, and if I cannot persuade you to go without telling you some of the horrors, I will do so. After arrest you would be treated like any other woman," he said, with intense earnestness.

She was deeply agitated, but still hesitated.

"I am loath to play on your fears, but you leave me no alternative. You must go, mademoiselle.

If you remain, remember what it will mean to Enderby here. His arrest also——"

"No, no, Peterson, cut that out," I interposed hurriedly, and turned to Alma. "What you have to remember is that the position is very different from what it was. We have put into their hands the actual proofs of the guilt of others, and there is really no reason why you should remain here because they refuse to act upon them."

But it was Peterson's last plea which prevailed with her. "You have convinced me," she said, turning to him; and then, to me, "If you wish it, I will go."

"Good," exclaimed my friend, rising. "I must leave you to settle your plan. Remember this, Enderby. Mademoiselle Kasslov, being a ward of the Emperor, has the right to throw herself upon the protection of the Court at Petersburgh, and nothing can prevent her going there. There's an excuse to get out of Moscow. And if you are once out, mademoiselle, I know very little of Enderby if he can't find a way to keep you out. I'll look up the procedure to be adopted."

When he had gone we discussed the matter at some length; and decided to adopt pretty much the same plan as I had formed before. Alma was to announce her determination to appeal to the authorities at Petersburgh, and fix the third day, Thursday, for her departure. This would tend to lull suspicion of all concerned and, if all went well, would give us time to get away.

It would not do for her to start for Petersburgh, because her absence would be noticed the instant she left the train; the wires would hum with the

news, a hue and cry would be raised instantly, and a run of two or three hundred miles in a motor through an unknown district under such conditions would be all but certain to lead to discovery.

I suggested that the next day, Wednesday, Alma should drive out to Fili to an old relative whom she visited occasionally—her visit to Petersburgh forming a quite plausible excuse—and send word home that she was going to remain the night there. I was to follow in my car, and when the coast was clear she was to join me. We should then motor to a point where we could take the train.

By this means I reckoned that we should be some hundreds of miles on our way to the frontier before her departure was even discovered. I still had in my possession the passport, in the name of M. Dufaure and his sister, which I had intended to use on the former occasion, and I was very confident that this and a few judicious bribes would get us safely away.

"I am very nervous. You are risking so much," she said when I was getting ready to go and make the necessary preparations.

"Do you mean in having you for a sister?"

"I may be a very troublesome one."

"Not if you play your part well and act as sisters do."

"How is that?"

"Oh, be very outspoken, a little rude, perhaps; a grumble now and then; in fact, anything to keep me in my place and make me feel that I'm a very ordinary sort of individual with about a quarter of the sense of other men."

"That does not seem very difficult," she retorted,

with a smile which I was very glad to see. But it soon gave way to a serious look. "But really, I am afraid for you. If we are discovered and stopped, it——"

"We shan't be," I interposed.

"You speak so confidently; but there are so many difficulties."

"Difficulties only exist to be overcome. Have courage."

"What I have I gain from you."

"No, no. That is not fair to yourself. You have ample courage of your own. You must be as confident as I am."

"I will try to be; and at least we—we shall be together"; and she slipped her hand into mine impulsively.

"You are putting great trust in me, Alma," I said, as I pressed her hand.

"Whom should I trust, if not——"

"Your brother?" I put in, finishing the sentence for her.

She looked up, and our eyes met. "I think I shall like having a brother," she said, and again she smiled.

"You must make the most of him, for I hope he won't be just a brother very long."

Her cheeks flamed with sudden crimson then, and I took her in my arms and kissed her passionately.

"Is that how brothers kiss, Paul?" she whispered.

"Not their sisters," said I; and for the next few minutes all our worries and perplexities were forgotten as I taught her the difference, with copious illustrations.

She made a delightful pupil.

CHAPTER XIV.

A TURN OF THE TERRORIST SCREW.

As it was essential that I should keep the fact of my departure a profound secret from everyone except my manager, Crossley, I had few preparations to make beyond providing myself with an ample amount of money and purchasing such things as I should need to maintain the character of the Frenchman whose passport we were to use.

Crossley could be trusted to see to all matters of business until fresh arrangements could be made, and I went to my office to discuss things with him. He entered readily into the plan, and volunteered to buy what I needed, urging that it might occasion less notice than if I myself bought them.

He went off at once on the errand, and had scarcely left when Eikov came in, looking very troubled.

"What's the matter, Eikov? You look worried enough for it to be serious."

"I fear it is very serious, sir, but for you rather than for me."

"For me?" I exclaimed, in astonishment.

"There was a meeting of the Young Russia Party last night, sir, and I was summoned to it to be

questioned about you. I was ordered to use my opportunities here to spy on you. I had to agree; but, of course, I meant to tell you at once, as you have treated me so generously."

"I don't know that I care much; but what reason have they?"

"They are looking to you to gain some information for them. I did not hear any details, but they have had your name given them by the great leader, Antonin Gregov, as being one of the best men in the city to do what was wanted."

"Antonin Gregov gave them my name?" I exclaimed, in profound astonishment.

"Oh, yes. I am quite certain about that. He must know all about you. Loris Gortoff had already told them of you, and that you could be induced to do it because they could bring pressure upon you. I had heard that before. Last night one of the leaders sent by Antonin Gregov himself was there, Sergius Palkavin. There are only three to whom he is personally known. He reported that Gregov had given your name, saying that you were a friend of Gortoff's, and that you could be forced to help them because of your friendship with Mademoiselle Kasslov."

"You take my breath away, Eikov."

"I am only telling you what I heard, sir. Pardon me for mentioning it, but it was said that you were in love with the mademoiselle; that she was a member of the party; and that she was to be compelled to use her influence with you by a threat of charging her with complicity in the assassination of her father."

This intimate knowledge of matters by the leader of the party astounded me.

"I was very closely questioned about this; what I had seen and heard, and whether I knew how often you went to her house; and I was able to tell from a slip which one of them made that Antonin Gregov himself had been for a long time in the late General's household; and then, of course, I knew that it had been in my place. It was he who assassinated the General. I had heard that often before, but his presence there accounts for his knowledge of everything."

"Do you know the object of all this?"

"Oh, yes, sir. Antonin Gregov has planned a great coup here in Moscow. Palkavin has been sent here specially to complete the whole organisation. There is to be a rising of the people, beginning with a general strike of all classes of the workers, and followed by an attack upon the authorities."

"Do you know when?"

"No, sir; but it will be very soon, I believe."

"That may be serious for us. Well, I have no objection to your playing the spy on me. I'm glad they chose you," I said, after a pause.

"I hope you don't think that, after what you have done for me, I shall betray you, sir?"

"Not for a moment. You can tell them all you see and hear."

"You know, of course, that some of them are very desperate men, and you will be on your guard? If they really have this power over Mademoiselle Kasslov, they will not hesitate to use it."

"We have already had evidence of that. They have threatened her."

He tossed up his hands. "I am sorry to hear it. It might be less dangerous if you could appear to fall in with their plans. But I don't presume to advise. I will let you know all I hear, of course; and can do that all the more easily because I have been ordered to do my utmost to get into your confidence."

"You have done that already, Eikov," I replied earnestly. "You could give me no greater proof that you deserve my confidence than by rendering me such a service as this. And you will never regret it"; and with that I sent him away.

His news was full of sinister omen. I had frequently heard the name of the revolutionary leader, Antonin Gregov, from Gortoff, but it astounded me to learn that he knew my private affairs so intimately as to be able to indicate the subtle means by which pressure could be employed to drag me into his infernal intrigues.

I was inclined to scent Gortoff's hand in this. He knew of my feeling for Alma, and probably guessed that that was strong enough to be made a lever to compel me to do what these reckless men desired.

Was he right? Yes—unless we could get away. Alma's safety was all in all to me; and to secure that I would turn revolutionary, or anything else short of an actual criminal, at any moment.

But Vodolski's threat to arrest me made even such a course useless. I was not very much troubled about the thought of my arrest. I was an English-

man, and however dilatory the Russian courts might be in dealing with their own countrymen, John Bull, prodded by the influence which my father was able to engineer, would be certain to have a word to say about my case. My father was just the man to make matters lively, if it came to that.

I felt that it was much more probable that Vodolski, anticipating trouble of the sort, would insist upon my leaving; in other words, would have me deported. And so far as Alma was concerned, that would be even worse than my arrest.

The crux was, however, that whether arrested or deported, I should not have a chance of adopting old Eikov's shrewd suggestion—to appear to play into the hands of the revolutionaries by temporising with their proposals.

Whichever way I looked at it, my conclusion was the same. Not a moment must be lost in getting Alma out of Russia; and I went home inclined to regret that I had not arranged to start that very night. And I soon had solid reason to emphasize that regret.

I was running through my papers selecting any of consequence and destroying the rest, when Gortoff came in, and I saw his eyes light significantly as he noticed the litter.

"I'm afraid I'm interrupting your preparations," he said, with a meaning emphasis on the word.

"Not a bit of it. There's nothing that can't wait a week, if necessary."

"When do you go, then?"

"Go? Where?" I asked, with an assumption of surprise.

"To England, of course. You've been warned to go, haven't you?"

"How the deuce do you manage to hear things, Gortoff? It's quite true. Baron Vodolski himself warned me, but no one else knows about it."

"Oh, we hear about police matters. We have to, you see," he replied, with over-acted carelessness.

"Then perhaps you know I have also been warned to expect arrest. If so, you'll understand why I'm running through my papers." I thought it rather a neat turn to give to his suspicions; but he did not believe it.

"Very prudent, no doubt," he said drily. "But at any rate my visit has surprised you, I'm afraid."

"Why should it?"

"Well, we didn't part last time on exactly the best terms, and you have never sent for me to give me your decision. It's that I've come for."

"Let us talk it over. Sit down and smoke"; and I shoved a box of cigars across to him.

"There's no need for much talk, is there? You can say yes or no."

"As Vodolski declares I must either be out of Russia in three days or be clapped into gaol, my yes or no wouldn't much matter, would it?"

"There is going to be big trouble, Enderby, and we must know who are with us and who against. The property of our friends will not be touched."

"You wouldn't have me turn revolutionary to save my property, surely?" I asked, with a smile.

"Not 'turn' revolutionary; merely avow your real sympathies. They are with us already. We know that."

"You know also that I'm dead against violence."

"The people have no other policy left to them. I told you once before that the time was close at hand when every man in Moscow must take a side. The hour has come. Which is to be your side?"

"I am afraid I can no longer be of any use to you. Vodolski and I have quarrelled. If you wished me to get information from him and I was actually willing to do it, I couldn't help you."

"You can still visit him, I suppose?"

I saw in a moment that the indifference with which he put the question was assumed. "Why do you ask that?"

He smiled. "You could make your peace with him, surely?"

"You have something in the back of your head. What is it?"

"Merely that we wish you to make peace and be on good terms with him."

This was not the truth. Gortoff was too genuine a fellow to be able to lie naturally; and I was on my guard in an instant. "Yes, I expect I could patch it up all right," I replied, with a shrug; "but the fact is, he takes a ridiculous view of something I did in regard to the investigation into General Kasslov's death."

"Concerning the daughter?" he asked quickly. "About your wish to get her away? I know something about that."

"My dear Gortoff, so far as I am concerned, you are at perfect liberty to know everything. As a matter of fact, Baron Vodolski is wrong-headed enough to believe that she actually killed her father;

and we quarrelled because he saw I thought he was a fool for his pains. Particularly as we had a confession from that girl, Fedora Douroff, which implicated Count Kaspar. I suppose you know that Dr. Busch declared the cause of death to have been poison?"

"The girl is a fool and a liar!" he exclaimed hotly. "The man who did that glorious deed was Antonin Gregov. I have told you that before."

"But what was Busch's motive for putting it down to poison? He was one of your party? Was it merely to throw off suspicion from Gregov?"

"He had planned to do it himself," replied Gortoff bluntly. "He was in league with Antonin Gregov, and he acted under orders. While there was a doubt about our leader escaping it was necessary to cast suspicion elsewhere and so distract the attention of the police; but as soon as he was in safety, he himself sent word of the truth."

"But if that was the reason, why was the knife left in the body with the Terrorist message upon it? It beats me."

"Who knew then that Ivan Eikov was in reality Antonin Gregov? As Eikov, he had to make sure of his escape. That is all."

"I see now," I admitted. "Well, the doctors have come to realise that death was not due to poison at all, and that Busch was wrong, and that has flung the whole thing back into the original mystery."

"Ah, it is a police-made mystery! That is all," he cried, with an impatient gesture. "They wish to make it out anything but what it is—a Terrorist victory. But in a few days there will no longer be

any secrecy. We are on the verge of the greatest popular triumph this empire has ever witnessed; and then the truth will be blazed from one end of the land to the other. You need have no fear that anyone else will ever suffer." He said this with a confident smile, but after a slight pause shrugged his shoulders and with a very significant look added, "Unless, of course, you yourself do anything to cause it."

I felt that we were now coming to the purpose of his visit, and resolved to play up to it. "How can I do anything of the sort?" I asked.

"You might seek to detach mademoiselle from our side. That would be one way. Another, you might continue to refuse to help us; or, again, you might seek to carry out your former purpose of inducing her to leave the city."

"Put it plainly, Gortoff," I said quietly.

"We need your help—with Vodolski."

"I have already told you I am powerless to help you with him."

"Will you do it if we show you the way?" He had grown intensely earnest.

I affected to think. "I might, if you do not ask me to gain information from him under the pretence of friendship and then betray it to you."

"It is not that."

"What is it?"

"Will you meet some of our party and discuss it?"

Again I affected to consider. "Yes. There would be no harm in that."

He drew a deep breath of satisfaction and then rose. "It will be to-morrow or the next night.

I will let you know. Your part has been assigned by none other than Antonin Gregov himself. You are joining the side of the people; and the people will rule here in Moscow before the month is out. There is only one thing more. Of course now you will induce Mademoiselle Kasslov to abandon her plan of leaving the city?"

Was it possible that he knew of our new plan? I was careful to suppress all sign of surprise. "That was abandoned days ago, man," I replied with a smile.

He turned on me sharply. "Was it? Are you sure?" he asked, with a look full of suspicion.

"Isn't it sufficient proof for you that she has not gone?" I asked, wondering very uneasily what was behind his question and suggestive manner. He learnt secrets so promptly, that I was half disposed to fear lest some hint of our intentions had reached him.

"You do not wish me to think that you would intentionally mislead me, Enderby?" was his next question, asked very pointedly.

"I think you know me well enough by this time to have seen that it is my way to say what I mean, and say it pretty clearly."

"Yes; but there's a woman in the case. Do you think that you quite realise all the bearings of this matter, and especially mademoiselle's position?"

"About as well as any man in Moscow, I should think. It has been very effectively drilled into me, I can assure you."

"I mean in regard to us," he replied impatiently.

"Haven't you made that pretty plain yourself?"

He paused, regarding me with frowning earnestness. "I don't know. But I will do so now. At such a juncture as this, Mademoiselle Kasslov would not be allowed to leave, Enderby. She is being very closely watched. We don't understand what is meant by her intention to go to Petersburgh. Yes, we've heard of that," he said, noticing the start I could not repress. "Now, take my advice. Discourage that. She cannot leave Moscow."

"My dear Gortoff, she is threatened with arrest, and it is thought necessary that she should seek the protection of the Court in the capital."

"The Court in the capital," he repeated, with a curl of the lip. "Does she imagine we cannot protect our friends? We can and shall, unless—unless, mark you, she tries to play us false. Unless, for instance, it was thought necessary that you should accompany her." He said this with most impressive significance and motioned toward the litter of papers in the room.

"I can't see that by going to Petersburgh she would be playing you false, as you put it," I replied. "But——"

"Don't let her attempt it, Enderby," he broke in quickly. "Don't let her attempt it. Abandon this journey, whatever its object and real destination. Don't let her play us false. Let that be my last word." And with that he went.

It would be impossible to exaggerate the alarm caused by his sinister warning that he and his associates were watching Alma because they suspected her intention and were resolved to prevent her flight.

To hoodwink the police would be difficult enough; but that was simplicity itself compared with the difficulty of eluding both their vigilance and that of the Terrorists.

And yet that was the combination we now had to face. It is little wonder that I felt my hopes of success dissolve like a child's pricked balloon.

CHAPTER XV.

ARRESTED.

IT was some time before I could shake off the uneasiness and alarm caused by Gortoff's visit. How had he learned that Alma meant to apply for the protection of the Court at St. Petersburgh—a fact known only to Alma, Peterson, and myself?

I could think of only one answer—that there was a spy in Alma's house who had overheard us discussing it. I had often had striking proofs of the ability of the Terrorists to obtain the most secret information with astonishing promptness; and I could not stifle the fear that Gortoff's solemn warning was prompted by a report which had reached him from some such source.

It would certainly be very much like toying with fire to attempt to fool them, and the consequences might indeed be grave and dangerous. But it was a choice of risks. Alma could not remain in the city in the face of Vodolski's threat. Her arrest must be prevented at all hazards.

There was another thing which baffled me—why this mysterious leader, Antonin Gregov, should have singled me out for some deed in connection with

Vodolski. The hand of this man of secrecy appeared to be omnipresent. His influence was everywhere discernible, although he himself was little more than a mere shadow.

As I thought of all this, the spell of the mystery surrounding him seemed to fasten on me. No project was too great for him to direct; no detail too small for him to know and utilise in his schemes; and as he had proved in venturing into the very household of his arch enemy, General Kasslov, no danger was too great to daunt him.

If Gortoff was right that Gregov's had really been the hand to kill the General, succeeding where a dozen others had failed, he was in all truth a man to be feared, and I am free to admit that I was profoundly disturbed by the thought of having to reckon with him as a foe in my struggle for Alma's safety.

Later on Peterson came to tell me that he had had Alma's intention to go to St. Petersburgh notified in due form, and when I told him of my interview with Gortoff, we agreed that the latter's knowledge of it was the result of leakage in official quarters. Then I asked him what he knew about Antonin Gregov.

"I know little of him except as the result of rumour," he replied. "That he is a man to be reckoned with, no one knows better than the Russian Government. A hundred efforts have been made to get hold of him, but never once with the slightest success. He has innumerable names, and Gregov is but one of them. Indeed, so impalpable is the man, that many of the authorities believe he is

only a myth; a mere name used by a sort of inner council to direct matters. But this is at least certain—whatever is decreed in his name is done."

"That's pleasant for me, seeing that he has apparently appointed me for some special task."

"You'll be out of the country before anything of that sort can happen. But I am bound to say it is an additional reason why you should go."

We then discussed the plan of the flight, and arranged that, as an extra precaution, I should not see Alma again until she drove out to meet me on the following afternoon for the start upon our journey.

I had my car out for an early spin the next morning and tested every part of it carefully; and on my return gave it out that I should need it in the afternoon to run over to Perova on business.

Fili, where I was to meet Alma at four o'clock, was about two miles to the west of the city. This would allow us over seven hours to reach Viasma before the train was due there. If all went well, we should be in Dunaberg by breakfast time, and across the frontier, by way of Vilna and Kovno, the same evening.

I had the passport in the name of the Frenchman, but as it turned out, I was to have my own duly viséd. A message came from Baron Vodolski in the course of the morning that he wished to see me at once, and when I reached him, he had a surprise for me.

"You are to leave Russia, Mr. Enderby," he said curtly.

"May I ask why? I have my business affairs here, and——"

"It is your father's wish," he interposed. "After you left here yesterday, I cabled him about you, and he requests me to send you home."

"I am not a bale of goods to be handled in that way, Baron Vodolski." I spoke with a great show of indignation, although as a matter of fact I was hugely pleased at the news. If he thought that I had left Alma behind in Moscow, there would be practically no fear of trouble from the police.

"I presume your father has a right to decide your movements."

"He gave that up long ago, I assure you. I am here in charge of this business concern, and the exigencies of that must decide my movements."

"I cabled him out of regard for your interests. I would have had him do the same for me, were the cases reversed."

"I am afraid my manner was very discourteous, and I ask your pardon," I said, with an appearance of regret for the words. "I am sure you wish to serve me on his account, but you are not able to enter into my feelings. Will you tell me the purport of your cable to him?"

"I told him that you were mixed up with the Terrorist party; that you were in some danger of getting into trouble, and that if he could spare the time he had better come out and see to things."

"You used pretty black colours for the picture," I commented, with a smile.

"I cabled my own opinion. That is all."

"And his reply?"

"You can read it for yourself," and he handed me the message.

It ran as follows:—"Send him home. Deport him if necessary."

"My father was never a man to waste words, especially in a cable," I said.

"You will not wish me to resort to the alternative?"

"I very much doubt if you have the power."

"You may leave me to settle that," he answered drily. "When will you go?"

"It would take me some time to make my arrangements."

"You can have a couple of hours. Quite enough for a young man. You have your passport, I presume. It shall be viséd at once. I shall cable your father that you leave to-day. And you will travel straight to the frontier."

"I do not remember saying that I should go." It would not do for me to yield without a fair show of reluctance.

"You will leave to-day. If you do not go, I shall resort to the alternative; and you will be escorted across the frontier. If your passport is not in my hands within half an hour, I shall take it as a sign that you refuse to go."

"As a matter of fact, I have it in my pocket"; and I brought it out. The passport was made out in the name of myself and my sister, as she had come with me the last time I had crossed; and a fresh one had been obtained when she had gone home alone. If he could be got to have that viséd, it might be an immense help to us. It struck me that it would be as well to exasperate him a little; so I affected to be quite undecided.

"Give it to me," he said, holding out his hand.

"No. I shall not go!" I exclaimed, with some heat. "I have done nothing of which I am ashamed; and I am not going to be driven about from pillar to post like a naughty schoolboy"; and I made a pretence of tearing the paper up.

"Don't do that! Listen to reason. For your father's sake——"

"I bid you good morning, Baron Vodolski," I interposed, in an angry tone.

He lost his temper then, and declared that if I did not hand him the passport on the spot, he would have me packed off there and then under escort; and he rang the bell to give the necessary orders.

At that I yielded a grudging assent, and, having carefully folded the paper so that he could not see that it was made out in the two names, I handed it to him.

He was too pleased with his victory to bother to read it, and, having rapidly initialled it, he gave it to the clerk who replied to the summons and told him to have the matter put through at once and the passport given to me.

We made peace then. I expressed regret for my loss of temper, thanked him for what he had done, and left his office, taking with me my passport duly authenticated and in proper order to carry "my sister" and myself safely out of the country.

It was a welcome little stroke of luck, and came just at the moment when most needed. A very little luck was all that was needed to turn the balance in our favour.

There was another thing. I thought I could understand why Vodolski had been so determined that I should leave Moscow that day. Neither of us had referred to Alma during the interview; but each knew that she was in the other's thoughts. She had fixed her departure for the evening of the following day; and he had probably read my reluctance to go as due to a desire to be in the city when she left. Hence his insistence upon my immediate departure indicated that he had no suspicion that her act was merely a bluff. This was why he had insisted that I should "travel straight to the frontier." He did not mean me to see Alma in the capital.

When I reached my rooms Peterson was waiting with a message from Alma. All was well with her, and she was almost as impatient as I myself for the hour of our departure to come.

"She's a plucky little soul, and that's the truth," he said.

"Has any obstacle been raised to her going to Petersburgh?" I asked.

"Not at present. I expect that at heart Vodolski is glad to have her go, and he knows that once in the capital she would be taken good care of."

"That's true, I hope; but it won't be the Russian capital if I can help it," I replied, with a grin; and I told him of my stroke of luck in regard to the passport. "That ought to do the trick all right, eh?"

"I've brought you another, and you may as well have it in case of need. It is in the name of Mr. and Mrs. Chester, American citizens, *en route* for Berlin,

I'll keep my ears open, of course, and if there is a hint of trouble I shall wire you to Dunaberg or to Vilna in the name of Chester. Wire me as soon as you are in Germany and use that name. And now, good-bye and the best of luck"; and we shook hands cordially and parted.

But I was not to start without a further surprise. I was waiting impatiently for the moment to arrive, when Count Kaspar came in.

"You are surprised to see me, friend Englishman," he said, with an attempt at his customary jauntiness; but, lined and careworn, his face belied his manner.

"I am; and none too pleased either. I thought you were in gaol—where you ought to be."

"That's just what I want to see you about—to put an end to all this quarrel. I'm willing to own I did you a dirty trick about that diary and made a fool of myself at the same time in throwing suspicion on my cousin."

"You'd better tell the police that."

"You mean that you think the police are still looking for me. Not a bit of it. I suppose you know the tangle they've got into on account of the fresh medical report? Well, that's brought me to you. I want to join forces with you in getting at the real truth."

"I don't mean to join with you in anything."

"What a peppery fellow you are. Why not?"

"Because I don't believe a word you say."

He tossed up his hands and laughed. "I don't think I'm altogether surprised, but will you hear what I've got to say?"

"I can give you ten minutes."

"Three will do if you don't mean to stand in with me. I'm in a mess; pretty much the same sort of mess as my cousin; and, like her, can only get out of it by finding out the truth about the death of my uncle. The statement of that liar, Fedora, has brought me under suspicion, and I should be in gaol if I hadn't been able to bring big influence to bear. I have seen Baron Vodolski and Bertloff and the rest of them, and I am left alone for the present on the understanding that I give them all the help I can to ferret out the truth."

"The truth!" I repeated, with a shrug. "You have only to admit it."

"No. On my soul I swear that I had nothing whatever to do with causing my uncle's death. That devil of a girl told half the truth—and that's the ugly part of it. But it was only half. I want you to believe me. I'll own to you that I meant things and had planned them; but when we entered my uncle's room he was already a dead man. He was lying there exactly as he was afterwards found. That's the truth, I declare to you solemnly."

"You'll have to get others to believe it. I don't."

"Just as you will. But the fact is I was so thunderstruck by the discovery that I nearly lost my wits. If I hadn't been a fool I should have roused the house there and then; and it would have been seen that the man had been dead some time before I got into the room. Instead of that I thought only of getting away. I was nearly crazy with panic. What that liar of a girl said about our hearing some one coming was as false as hell. We were not in the

room more than a few seconds; and within a minute or two I was out of the house again."

"I met you on the street, you know."

"It was that which added to my fear and set me puzzling my wits how to turn suspicion in some other direction. That's the truth; believe it or not, as you will; and now the position is, that unless the mystery can be cleared up, I shall have to convince others of the truth of what I've told you. And I'm not fool enough to think they will be more ready to believe me than you are. Now, will you let me work with you to unearth the real criminal and clear Alma?"

"The case against her is the merest and flimsiest rubbish."

"Ah, I see you don't know the latest development. These fools of police believe that she and I were in league together, and had Fedora as an accomplice. I tell you, on my oath, that if it had not been for that fresh report of the doctors, we should both have been on our trial now. They have extorted some further statements from Fedora—you know the means they use to get that sort of thing—and it has made the case as black as it can be. They are going to exhume my uncle's body and have a further examination; and I know what that means, if you don't. They will get a report to fit their own view."

The man was so false that my judgment warned me not to believe a word he said; but he was intensely in earnest, and I could not entirely repress the feeling that his protestation of innocence of the actual deed itself might be true.

"Who was the murderer, do you think?" I asked, after a pause.

"It was Terrorist work, right enough. Everything points to that. And there is only one thing to be done—find that scoundrel Eikov, my uncle's servant, and get at what he knows."

"And your servant, Borodak, or Palutin, as he turns out to be?"

"It was not his work. I've heard his statement and believe it. He was out of the house before it could have been done—an hour before, at least. No; the man we must find is Eikov."

"The world is a pretty big place to search."

"Have you thought what will happen if we don't find him? It suits the Government to prove that this was the work of anyone rather than the Terrorists; and if—no, not if, but *when* they get the sort of medical report they want, they'll clap both Alma and me into gaol and torture us till they drive us to confess. My God, I'm mad when I think of it."

His face went ashen white with the fear his own words conjured up; and I thanked heaven silently that within a few hours Alma would be out of the country, and free from the risk of treatment, the bare thought of which had agitated him so deeply.

"Come again to-morrow afternoon," I said, as if meaning to think it over.

He rose with a weary sigh. "I'll come. I shan't face imprisonment and torture. If you refuse to work with me, it will be my sentence of death. Bear that in mind when you are making your decision"; and he went away, trembling and broken by his overwhelming fear.

If Count Kaspar's story was true, it meant that Alma's danger would be greater than even we had thought, and I was only too thankful when at length the time arrived for me to start to meet her.

Perova lay in the opposite direction from Fili, and I kept up till the last moment the pretence that I was going to the former place. But as soon as I was well clear of the city, I turned westwards and ran back through the outskirts to the Fili road.

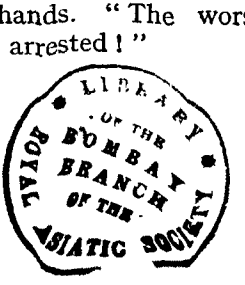
I was an enthusiastic motorist, and justifiably proud of my car, knowing that I could have run to Viasma and back again in the time I had allowed myself. I was dead certain that we should catch the train, and almost as confident that, when we were once in it, we should reach the frontier safely.

I was first at the meeting-place and jumped out to give a last look to make sure that everything was in perfect trim, and had just satisfied myself when I heard the sound of horses' hoofs and saw Alma's carriage coming, not from Fili but from the city.

This was not in accordance with our plan, and my involuntary twinge of uneasiness changed to alarm when I saw that Miss Peterson was alone in it.

With a chill of apprehension I ran to her. "Where is Alma? Is anything wrong?" I asked eagerly.

She threw up her hands. "The worst, Mr. Enderby. She has been arrested!"



CHAPTER XVI.

WORSE THAN ARREST.

ALMA arrested!

The news was like a flash of lightning from a clear sky. At the very moment when I had made certain of success, and had calculated the hour which would see us across the frontier, the blow had fallen with staggering force.

"I am so sorry to bring you such bad news," said Miss Peterson, seeing my distress; "but I thought it best to rush out to you at once."

"Will you tell me exactly what occurred? I can't understand it. I suppose you can't possibly have been mistaken."

"There is no mistake, I'm sorry to say. Alma and I were waiting for the carriage, and she was in high spirits at the thought of getting away and absolutely confident of success, when the men arrived."

"Who were they? Grovski, or anyone whom Alma knew?"

"No. They came from Baron Vodolski, and had a paper signed by M. Bertloff. There were two of them, one in police uniform; and the other, who did

the talking, was most polite and quite apologetic. He said that it was on account of her intended journey to Petersburgh and that she was not to be allowed to go. She protested with great spirit that no one had any right to stop her ; and it was then he produced his paper from M. Bertloff. 'I am sorry, but I can only obey my orders,' he said, 'I have to request that you accompany me. My instructions are very peremptory and admit of no refusal.' "

"It was scandalous," I broke in hotly.

"Alma was awfully brave," continued Miss Peterson. "I should have fainted, I am sure, if it had been my case. She continued to protest, and at last demanded to be allowed to communicate with my brother. The man's manner grew sterner. She would be allowed to communicate with anyone she wished, but she must go with them at once, he declared ; and when she still resisted, he told her that she did not understand the real position, and that she was being arrested on the charge of being concerned in the murder of General Kasslov."

"She had to go, of course."

"Yes. He said that he had a strong force at hand in case of any resistance being offered ; but that he hoped she would not put him to the pain of using it. He had a carriage with him in order that the unpleasant affair might be arranged with the least possible publicity."

"Did he say where they were taking her ? "

"She asked that ; and he said that in the first instance she was to go to Baron Vodolski. She saw that further resistance was useless, and, after

asking me to see Alec and tell him at once, she went off with them. Then I hurried here as fast as I could."

"I am deeply obliged to you. Will you now drive back to your brother and tell him what has happened, and that I shall go straight to Baron Vodolski. Ask him to come to me there. We must get to the bottom of the thing at once."

She returned to the carriage and I sprang into my car and started for the city. My blood was boiling with indignation at the outrage—for an outrage it certainly was to arrest Alma in face of the fresh medical report that her father's death had not been caused by poison.

Then I recalled Kaspar's words—that the body was to be exhumed and a still further examination made, and that the police would be certain to get a report which would fit with their wishes and theories. Could they have secured that report already? And was the arrest the consequence?

As I rushed back to the city, a hundred thoughts of the kind flashed through my head mingling with the ache of disappointment at the failure of our escape.

I sent in my name to Baron Vodolski with an urgent request that he would see me at once; and he received me with a smile, as if he had not the least idea of the business which had brought me there. "I am very busy now, but I presume you wish to see me on some important matter, judging by your message. What is it?"

"You probably know quite well," I replied bluntly.

He frowned at my tone. "Indeed, I do not."

"It is about Mademoiselle Kasslov's arrest, of course."

"Why, of course? Your manner is very strange."

"It is not so strange as your action. Why was she arrested?"

If I had been the Czar himself, my tone could not have been more dictatorial; and very naturally he took offence. He drew himself together and looked very sternly at me. "Do you presume to catechise me, sir?" and he rang his table bell and rose to put an end to the interview.

I saw my mistake then, hot with temper though I was; so I choked down my rage. "I beg your pardon, Baron Vodolski; but this thing has almost unmanned me. Mademoiselle Kasslov has just been arrested, and I came to ask you for news of her."

He looked at me very keenly, and seeing my agitation, he resumed his seat and sent away the man who answered his summons. "You are a very difficult young man to deal with, Mr. Enderby."

"I am in deep distress of mind, sir. I forgot myself, and beg your indulgence."

"It is forgotten," he said, with a wave of the hand. "Now tell me what you mean and what you want."

"Mademoiselle Kasslov has been arrested this afternoon on a charge of being concerned in the death of her father, and——"

"Wait a moment. Arrested, you say? By whose orders?"

"By yours. She was to be brought here to you in the first place. For God's sake, don't prolong this agony of suspense!"

"When do you say this happened, and how did you hear of it?"

"Within the last hour; I heard of it from Miss Peterson, a countrywoman of mine, who was present at the time the arrest was made."

"I am as much at a loss as you yourself. I know nothing about it."

I stared at him in blank amazement. "You—you have not ordered it?" I stammered. "But she was brought here."

"I repeat, I know nothing whatever about it. I have given no order for her arrest, nor have I any intention of issuing such an order at present. Mademoiselle Kasslov has announced her intention of going to the capital to-morrow to seek the protection of the Court; and within the last hour I have been engaged in arranging for her to be taken there."

"The police, then; it must be their work."

"That is out of the question. Until we are more clear in regard to the medical testimony in the case, no arrest will be made; none could be made, indeed."

"Yet she *has* been arrested, sir. That is certain."

"You have been misinformed."

"But that is equally impossible. Miss Peterson was present."

He threw up his hands, as if the thing were inexplicable. Then his expression changed, and he shot a keen look of suspicion at me. "Are you sure you yourself know nothing of this? Is this thing a scheme to get her away from the country?"

"I give you my word of honour, Baron Vodolski,

that the arrest has come upon me as an overwhelming surprise."

"You have had no thought of attempting to get her away? On your honour?" He fixed his piercing eyes on me as he put this question.

"I cannot answer that question," I replied slowly, after a pause.

"Ah!" He uttered the exclamation with the air of a man who has got to the bottom of things. "Had you not better tell me everything?"

"Perhaps it will be best," I agreed; and then I admitted the scheme I had formed to get Alma away. I spoke very freely, but kept Peterson's name out of it. The plan had failed, and there was no longer reason for holding my tongue about my part in it.

"After that I can, of course, do no more for you. You have been guilty of gross deception toward me, and you will leave Russia to-night."

"I beg you will not ask me to do that until I have satisfied myself of the safety of Mademoiselle Kasslov."

"I do not ask you, I order you to leave."

"While the woman I love is in this danger, I will not go, sir."

"You will leave to-night," he replied curtly.

"You have no power to expel me against my will. I have committed no offence against your Government. If I have, put me on my trial for it. I am a British subject, and——"

"You are a hot-headed young fool!" he rapped back. "Too hot-headed to remember that it lies in my absolute discretion to say what foreigner

shall or shall not remain in this city. I repeat, you will leave to-night."

"We shall see. I am going straight to the Consulate now." And with that I flung out of his room in a rage, paying no heed to his call to me to return.

Did the man take me for a cold-blooded, heartless brute to think of leaving at a time when Alma was in this trouble ?

I drove straight to the Consulate, and was just in time to catch Peterson as he was leaving to come to Vodolski's in search of me. I told him what had passed, and the threat to expel me forcibly from the country, and that I put myself under the protection of the Consulate.

He was as indignant as I about the matter, but he shook his head, and told me that Vodolski had absolute power to deport me. Then we discussed the arrest, and he offered to see M. Bertloff while I got hold of Grovski.

As I crossed the Cathedral Square, I was surprised to see Count Kaspar. As Alma was arrested, why was he at large ? I pulled up and told him the news. He protested that M. Bertloff had assured him no arrests would be made until the result of the further medical examination was known ; and he offered to find out what it meant.

I didn't care where the information came from ; so I agreed readily and hurried on to Grovski's house. I had not forgotten that suggestive chat we had had about my willingness to pay well if I could find a friend in the police, and meant to carry it a stage farther now.

He smiled when I told him of Alma's arrest, that she had been taken to Vodolski's bureau, and that the Baron had denied any knowledge of the affair.

"Why come to me, then? Isn't his Excellency's word good enough for you?"

"Do you really mean that you know nothing of it either?"

"Do you think I'm tired of the police service? If I were to do such a thing without authority, I should be out of it in an hour. I tell you frankly that no such arrest has been made, Mr. Enderby."

"Will you come with me to her house and hear Miss Peterson's story?"

"Of course I will. There may be something we ought to know"; and we set off for Alma's house.

"This is a fine car of yours, Mr. Enderby," he said, as we drove along. "Are you taking it with you?"

"Taking it where?"

"You are leaving Moscow, I understand."

"I don't suppose I shall take it with me. You are right; it is a very powerful car and very fast. But I would give more than this car to be relieved of my present anxiety."

"It's a good thing to be rich," he observed, after a pause. There was envy in his tone, and it struck me that there was more in the words than they appeared to mean. Was he fishing for a bribe? If I could secure the help of such a man it would be worth almost anything.

"Yes," I replied casually. "I am a rich man, fortunately for me; and one day shall be worth some forty million roubles."

He caught his breath. "Forty million roubles!"

he repeated, in a tone of positive awe. "And I don't get a hundred roubles a month." This was a little more than a whisper; but I have sharp ears and caught the words.

"If I had such a man as you in London you'd soon be earning five or ten times that amount, Grovski."

He sighed heavily. "I suppose it's a great place."

"There are many great places in England, and prospects of wealth in every one of them. Yes, when anyone helps me I can afford to pay with a very liberal hand. A few odd hundred roubles, or even a few thousand, don't count with me when I have to get what I want."

"I wish the Government dealt with us in the same style," he said, after a pause, and with another sigh.

I held my tongue for a minute, and as we were getting near Alma's house I slowed down so that the talk shouldn't end too abruptly. "You said something just now about my leaving Moscow. What was in your thoughts?"

"You are to leave to-night, sir; and it is very likely that I shall have to take you."

"I don't wish to go. I wish to stop in order to get to the bottom of this arrest of Mademoiselle Kasslov."

"I've no doubt that I could help you in that."

I took advantage of his ambiguous reply and resolved to put the thing to a practical test. I took some notes from my pocket, about a thousand roubles, and let them fall on the floor of the car. "I've dropped something," I said.

He picked them up and held them out toward me. Our eyes met. "Just as you like," I said casually.

He fingered them nervously. I affected to be engrossed in managing the car. After a moment he put them in his pocket.

"I can give you gold for them later on, if you'd rather," I added with a smile. "I have it on me, in fact. You won't regret it, Grovski. And now we'll push on." I quickened up, and a minute or two later we stopped at Alma's house.

Grovski questioned Miss Peterson closely as to the description of the men who had made the arrest, and his verdict was clear and emphatic. "They are none of our men, Mr. Enderby, but I'll find out who they are."

We parted on that understanding, and I went to my office, where I found a note from Peterson saying that he had seen M. Bertloff, who assured him that he knew nothing of the arrest. "This makes it perfectly plain that Mademoiselle Kasslov is not in the hands of the police," he added.

It was impossible to think otherwise, and I was wondering despairingly where she could be, how I could possibly find her, and a hundred other baffling problems, when Eikov came to me. "Can I speak to you, sir?" he asked.

"Yes. What is it?"

"I have been ordered to see you, sir, about—about Mademoiselle Kasslov."

I fired with impatience on the instant. "Do you know where she is? Tell me, quick, all you know."

"She is there, sir"; and he laid a slip of paper on my desk, with an address on it in Alma's handwriting, and the words:—

"I am here, and in sore trouble."

I leapt to my feet. "Is it the truth? I'll go there instantly."

"Oh, Mr. Enderby, don't you understand? It's a decoy message."

"Is she there? Tell me that. I'll see to the rest," I cried.

"Yes, sir, she is there; but please listen to me first. She was taken this afternoon merely to trap you. She is in no danger; and if you will leave it to me I think I can get her away. They knew you were to be forced to leave the city to-day, and this was done to prevent it. You will risk your life and more than your life if you go. They mean to compel you to join them."

"I shall go, Eikov, and at once."

"But if you will wait, I am confident I can get her away. At the worst it would be a day or two, and——"

"It would be a day or two of hell for me. I have made up my mind"; and, slipping my revolver into my pocket, I started at once.

CHAPTER XVII.

I AM DEPORTED.

I WAS not to carry out my intention without interruption, however. At the end of the street I met Grovski hurrying toward me.

"I have important news for you, Mr. Enderby. I have been told off to see you across the frontier."

"I shall be glad to have so congenial a companion," I replied with a smile.

"My orders are very imperative. We are to leave by the early mail west, at eight o'clock, and M. Bertloff will be at the station to see us off," he said, with a meaning look. "He has to report at once to Baron Vodolski."

"The devil he has!" I exclaimed, coming to an abrupt halt. "What shall we do?"

"He will have to make this report."

"Is he a man who is able to make a report of what he hasn't seen?"

Grovski shook his head. "Not at all. You will have to start."

"Where does the train make the first stop?"

"Viasma."

"That's over a hundred miles!" I exclaimed, in dismay.

"That is the first scheduled stop, but trains are sometimes stopped on signal, of course," he said, slowly and with much significance. "There is a box about a mile outside the city where the signalman is a friend of mine. A hundred roubles is a great deal to a railwayman; they are very badly paid. He might be fined five roubles for his carelessness."

"Can you manage it?" I asked eagerly, with a sigh of relief.

"You will give me your word to be at the station?"

"Certainly. Here's the money you need."

"There's another thing. If I report having seen you across the frontier, you must not run the risk of being seen in the city for two days."

"I understand that. But what would happen if you were to return now and report that you had failed to find me?"

The words were scarcely out of my lips before M. Bertloff came up to us; and of course any such chance was out of the question.

He greeted me pleasantly and expressed his regret at the course things had taken, and that I had to leave.

I deemed it best to appear indignant at the whole proceeding and let myself go with some very tall talk about what I would do.

He listened in silence, and then sent Grovski away to prepare for his journey. "I will stay with you, Mr. Enderby, in the meantime, to be of use perhaps in your packing or some such thing."

I laughed. "A neat way of saying, I am under arrest, eh?"

"I always seek to make the unpleasant things I am compelled to do at times as little irksome as possible," he answered; and we drove to my rooms, where I packed a handbag with such things as I needed for immediate use, and then bundled a lot of clothes into a trunk.

During the packing I tried to get him to talk about matters. He told me that his view of Alma's disappearance was that she was endeavouring to fly the country and would not succeed; that her flight pointed ominously toward her guilt; and that all those who were suspect had probably had a hand in the assassination plot. He ended with a significant hint that I had good reason to be glad that I should be on the other side of the frontier when the further arrests were made, and thankful for having a friend in Baron Vodolski.

"You don't mean I should be arrested? Do you take me for a murderer?"

"Pardon me, I have not said that," he replied, smiling and spreading his hands. "I take you for an English gentleman very much enamoured of a lovely young woman for whose sake you acted with an indiscretion you would find it very difficult to explain away as a mere desire to help her in her trouble. And now shall we start? I am really anxious to bid you 'Bon voyage.' You have chivalrously allowed your feelings to mislead you terribly, Mr. Enderby, and are much better out of the trouble than appeared possible at one time. I will not say any more; and indeed should not have said so much, had not Baron Vodolski authorised me, with the object of making you realise the serious

danger you will run, should you be so rash as to attempt to return."

"I shall not forget your warning," I replied equivocally.

Grovski was at the station before us, and had arranged for a compartment containing two berths to be reserved for us in a carriage at the end of the train. I saw the object of this, and congratulated myself upon the value of the investment I had made in purchasing his help.

M. Bertloff, scrupulously polite all through, inspected all the arrangements, and did not leave until he had waved his smiling "Bon voyage" to me as the train steamed out.

The instant we started, I asked Grovski whether he had arranged to have the train stopped.

"It is all right," he said. "But we shall have to be careful. We must have the door behind there kept open, and I am going to stand at it on the plea that I want fresh air. Be ready to get off the instant you find the train beginning to pull up. The train will not stop, only pause, and you must drop off. Lie down the instant you are off the train to lessen the chance of your being seen, and when all is clear get off the track at once."

"How will you manage?"

"Easily. I shall have the beds made up at once, and not opened up until the train is at the frontier. I shall say that you are suffering from train sickness. They know me, and will take my word. You'll have seen that we are behind the brake van. I arranged that."

"I may wish to communicate with you on your return to Moscow; can you arrange that?"

"Yes. You can write to my house, using any name—say, Vossler. It is well known that I have a hobby for collecting prints; you can use some excuse of the sort; and if you need to see me at once, add the words 'Ready money.' I shall understand."

He went away then, and I heard him talking to the guard and arranging for the door to be left open. Then the official passed and went forward.

A minute or two later the engine began to whistle furiously and the bell to clang; the brakes went on, and the speed slackened. I seized my handbag and ran out to Grovski.

"It's all right," he said. "The guard has gone forward. Remember that if you are seen anywhere in Moscow before the evening of the day after to-morrow, I shall be a ruined man."

"I shan't forget. Don't be afraid," I replied.

"I'll go forward and prevent the man coming back."

I got down cautiously on to the step and waited while the train slackened speed. By great good fortune a heavy mist had come on; and although I should have risked the escape had the light been as bright as at noon-day, I was very thankful for the luck.

The whistle was still sounding furiously, and the train continued to slacken speed until a jerk forward warned me that the signal had been altered. I dropped off directly, stepped between the metals, threw myself down at full length, and lay still until the rear lights had been swallowed by the mist.

Then, recalling Grovski's caution, I scrambled to my feet, got off the track, and crossed some fields

until I came to a road, and hurried along in the direction of the city.

I had, of course, to exercise great caution. I was now a fugitive from the police, and I had Grovski's risk to think of as well as my own.

There were plenty of people who would recognise me in my present dress, and the first necessity was to arrange some sort of disguise. But how to do it bothered me considerably. I began with my moustache. I lit a match and very carefully singed one side of it. In this condition I turned into the first barber's I came to and spun a yarn about having set it on fire in lighting a cigarette.

While the man was shaving me I noticed two or three old coats hanging on the wall—it was a very dirty little place—and I resolved to buy one in my own fashion. The barber was as garrulous as most of his kind, and as business was slack I stopped and chatted. I found out in this way where I was. Then I suggested drinks and sent him out to buy the liquor. As soon as his back was turned, I whipped the oldest of the coats into my bag, and took the chance of his discovering the loss of it on his return.

He did not; and under the pretence of good fellowship I gave him a tip liberal enough to more than cover the value of the coat I had annexed, and, in addition, bought a number of things I did not want. In this way I left him well satisfied.

All these preparations had taken time, however; and it was dusk when I reached the house from which Alma had sent the appeal for help that Eikov had warned me was intended only as a snare to entrap me.

The house was certainly one of the last in the

city which I should have suspected of being a Terrorist centre.

The neighbourhood was a good one; the street one of the best; and all the houses in it detached, surrounded with gardens, large, commodious, and eminently suggestive of comfort-loving and respectable citizenship.

Before venturing in, I walked the length of the street, and when I turned back I saw that I was being carefully but unostentatiously shadowed. One or two men were lounging at the street corners, and a couple of others, in the garb of grooms, were chatting and smoking with their backs against the railings of one of the houses. As I passed, one of them burst into a laugh and pushed his companion close to me as if in jest, and the latter gave me a sharp, searching look.

I had no doubt that they were spies on the look-out for the police; and probably they mistook me for a secret agent on the prowl. It was clear that no one could enter that street at any hour without being watched.

I crossed to the entrance of the house, and as I pushed open the large gate I saw the two men looking after me, while another groom, carrying a pitch-fork, came out from the stables which were close to the house. At the same moment one of the couple in the street burst out into a loud raucous laugh, and I saw by the start which the stableman gave that it was intended as some sort of signal.

"What do you want here?" he asked me gruffly.

"What's that to you?" I rapped back.

"You'll soon see that. We don't want any of

your ragged sort here"; and he put himself in my way.

I had forgotten, until he used the word "ragged," that my clothes deserved such an epithet. I smiled. It struck me as not a little comic that a plan, carefully laid by these men for trapping me, should be threatened with failure because one of them would not let me step into it.

"You are making a mistake, my man. Let me pass."

He held his ground, staring fixedly at me. "Who are you, and your object? In one word, you know."

I guessed at once that this was the first of a set of pass words. "I don't know your one word, but I know that I am going into that house."

"We shall see about that. Loris!" he called.

Another man, also dressed as a groom, came out from the stables, and to my surprise I recognised Scharkoff, the rascal whom Count Kaspar had employed to help in the robbery of the diary. I waited to see if he would know me.

He gave me a sharp glance, but there was no light of recognition in his shifty, cunning look.

"Now will you go?" demanded the first man.

I turned to the other. "Is M. Gortoff here, Scharkoff?"

He knew my voice; I heard him swear under his breath, and he changed colour slightly. "He's from the police," he whispered to his companion. This was evidently his interpretation of the cause of my former tussle with him.

The other let his fork drop with a loud clang on the flags. It was another signal. The two men in

the street showed at the gate and a third appeared at the stable door. They were now five to one, and if I had been a police agent I should have felt extremely uncomfortable.

"You must take me for a big fool if you think that as a police agent I should come here alone," I said, with a glance at the men around. "We've had enough of this. Take me into the house. It's much more convenient to kill a man indoors than out."

"You can come in if you wish," muttered Scharkoff, his look full of vindictive malice.

"Lead the way then. Quick," I said sharply.

We went toward a small side door, Scharkoff following close at my heels; and the moment we were inside, the latter whipped out a knife and seized me.

"Now, I'll make you pay for it, you spy!" he cried, with a fierce oath.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FELLOW-PRISONERS.

FOR a few moments after I entered the house matters looked very ugly. The passage into which I had been led was very narrow and almost dark; Scharkoff's attack had taken me completely by surprise, and as he had gripped my right arm and prevented me from getting at my revolver, I could not have fought even if I had wished.

But I was too prudent to make any such attempt. Instead I allowed my body to go limp and lolled back against him, as if I had nearly fainted from fright, but I took care to hamper his movements.

It was a very simple ruse, but it succeeded. He released my arm and stepped back a pace to let me fall to the ground; and the next instant I had him covered.

"Drop that knife, or you'll never hold another," I cried, as I scrambled to my feet. "That's better," as he let it fall. "Now one of you go and say that Mr. Enderby, the Englishman, is here."

"Why didn't you say who you were?" growled the other man.

"Go and do what I say, and be hanged to you.

And you stay where you are, Scharkoff. You know whether it's safe to play pranks with me."

He had no mind to disobey, and the other man took me upstairs to a room and brought Gortoff, who gave a start of surprise at seeing my garb and held out his hand.

I did not take it. "Where is Mademoiselle Kasslov?" I asked.

"Don't we meet as friends, Enderby?"

"We can part as friends, if Mademoiselle Kasslov leaves with me. Not otherwise. If you have had a hand in this, I don't want any such friends."

"What makes you think she is here?"

"Because I had a message from her."

"Who gave you that?" he asked, with a pretence of anger.

I was on the point of blurting out too much about Eikov, but pulled myself up. "No matter. I had it. If you are the friend you suggest, you will help me to take her away."

"Do you mean that someone betrayed this house to you?"

"Do you mean that you are for or against me in this, Gortoff?"

He paused, and made a gesture of perplexity. "Do you know what house this is that you have forced your way into?"

"I came for Mademoiselle Kasslov, and am going to take her away. Do you deny that she is here?"

"No. She is here. But how could you learn it?"

His continued pretence of indignation irritated me. "Will you tell me why she was brought here, and

whether there is to be any trouble about letting her go ? "

" I give you my word I have nothing to do with that."

" Will you take me to her, or bring her to me ? "

" I have no power," he repeated. " It is madness for you to have ventured here, unless—unless you have come prepared to throw in your lot with us. You would secure mademoiselle's safety in that event, of course. But if you have come in a hostile sense, then——" and he threw up his hands as if to indicate the trouble ahead for me.

" I have come to secure her safety at any cost. Who is your leader ? "

" Sergius Palkavin. Will you see him ? "

" I'll see the devil himself if it will help my purpose."

" Can I say that, like Mademoiselle Kasslov, you are friendly ? "

" You can please yourself what you say, Gortoff. It won't bind me, and you know pretty well what my real feelings are."

" Will you wait here a minute ? "

" I've come to wait until I can take mademoiselle away with me."

Gortoff's manner left me in no doubt that Eikov's tale was true. The thing was just a plant to trap me for some purpose which I should no doubt learn quite soon enough. Alma had to be saved ; and whatever conditions were offered, I was ready to accept them.

If I could not succeed without pretending to be a Terrorist, a Terrorist I would become. I had one

thing to accomplish, and only one—to save Alma; and to achieve that, I would do anything short of murder. And they were scarcely likely to propose that.

I was utterly reckless. I was already a fugitive from Vodolski's agents. I dared not show my face on the streets of the city for three days, and even then only at the risk of being arrested for complicity in the murder of General Kasslov. Alma was in an even worse plight; Bertloff's words of warning that evening showed that. And dear as she was to me, I would rather take her life with my own hand than see her thrust into one of the hells of prisons to be tortured into a confession of a crime she had never committed.

I knew her courage, and that she would rather die than face an ordeal of the kind. We were thus both in a fitly desperate mood to face any crisis which might be forced upon us by the men who had made her a prisoner, and had spread the snare to catch me in the same web.

When Gortoff returned, he said that Sergius Palkavin would see me, and he led the way to another room. As the door opened the voices of several men were hushed and the eyes of all were turned upon me curiously.

I found myself in the presence of some half-dozen men, two of whom were seated at a table, and the others lounging in easy chairs smoking. It might have been the smoke-room of a small club, judging by the air of informality which appeared to prevail. I say "appeared" because it was not difficult to see that under the surface there was an almost plumbless depth of earnestness.

One of the two at the table, Sergius Palkavin—a dark, heavily-bearded man with large handsome features and keen searching eyes—motioned me to a chair. "We are glad to see you with us, Mr. Enderby."

"If that means that knowing the object of my presence you are agreed that it shall succeed, I also am glad," I replied, as I sat down.

"I have no doubt we shall agree. We will discuss it later. If you are as shrewd as report says, you understand of course that you have been brought here by us intentionally. I will be frank with you. Mademoiselle Kasslov was brought here to prevent your leaving Moscow; and the message from her to you was devised by us to bring you to rescue her."

"That sounds frank, at any rate. But you might have spared your ingenuity. If you had sent me word where she was, I should have come without trapping."

"Part of the message was an exaggeration. The young lady is in no danger. It is not a part of our intentions that she should come to any harm at our hands—unless you yourself make it necessary. She had announced her intention of leaving Moscow and you were being sent away. It was necessary to prevent that, and she was therefore detained. But it is not her co-operation we need. It is yours."

"Can I see Mademoiselle Kasslov?"

"Certainly." He gave the assent as if it were the most ordinary thing in the world. "You will understand, of course, that neither of you can be allowed to leave the house at present, not until you have complied with the object for which you have

been brought here. And it is scarcely necessary to tell you that, although you will not find any display of force in the house, the consequences of any attempt to escape will be very serious for you both."

"The object of my being brought here?" I repeated. "What is that?"

"That you join our movement, Mr. Enderby, and take the oath of obedience." If he had been detailing the duties of a clerkship, he could not have spoken more coolly. "We know that you are in sympathy with us"; and he waved toward Gortoff.

I endeavoured to imitate his coolness. "That requires consideration, of course," I said. "And if I refuse?"

"You will not refuse, I think; but you can have time to consider. And now you wish to see the mademoiselle?" He turned to Gortoff, who rose.

He was in many ways a remarkable man. His tone throughout had been soft and courteous, but he had nevertheless made me understand, as no threats or violent language could have done, the peril which threatened me should I refuse to join the movement.

I knew that my life would depend upon my decision.

Gortoff appeared to be a little ashamed of his part in the affair. He led me up two flights of stairs, and when we reached the upper floor he said: "I am sorry for this, Enderby. You can see, however, that I have only to obey the orders which are given to me."

"Then why make a farce of apologising? You have been trying to force me into the movement for

a long time. Besides, as I said in the room below, I should have come here in any event."

"What Palkavin said is the truth. Mademoiselle Kasslov is in no sort of danger."

"I find that a bit difficult to believe," I said drily.

"It is absolutely true," he asserted earnestly.

"If I turn Terrorist, you mean. It seems to me a low-down sort of game to make a lever of an innocent woman. But you're a Russian, and I suppose can't see it as I do."

"It is for the cause."

"Hang the cause!" I replied shortly, only I put it more strongly.

"I can't hear that even from you, Enderby," he said hotly.

"Then shut your ears. It's a coward's game you're playing, nothing else."

He frowned, and turned toward a door along a corridor, and to my surprise it was not even locked. But I was soon to understand that there can be secure prisons without bolts and locks and bars, and I had already begun to have a great respect for the vigilance of the men who held us prisoners.

He knocked at the door, and my heart gave a leap as I heard Alma's voice call to us to enter.

"I bring you a friend, mademoiselle," said Gortoff, and drew aside for me to enter.

Alma had been reading, and she jumped up, dropped the book, and turned toward the door in surprise. For a moment the change I had made in my appearance misled her, and her expression of questioning doubt was blended with some alarm. Then her features relaxed into a smile, and she put

out her hands as if to welcome me, but the next instant drew them back, her face signalling concern and trouble.

"Oh, why have you come here?"

I captured her hands and, holding them, looked into her troubled eyes. "Because I found it too hard to stay away."

Her face told me how keen was the struggle in her heart between joy and fear. "I hoped you were safely out of all the trouble. And this disguise?" she added, with a look of dismay.

"Don't you think I make a good moujik?" I laughed, looking down at my shabby, ill-fitting clothes.

"And you can jest at it all?"

"We will both laugh as long as we can. Now that I see you again, safe and well, my heart is light enough even to laugh."

"Safe?" she repeated.

"Safe, compared with what my fears were when I heard that you had been arrested. That would have been far worse even than this. I could not then have even seen you."

"You should not have ventured here. And how did you know where to find me?"

"I heard where you were."

"Do you know what this place is?"

"One of the Terrorist centres."

"You must have been deceived. They tried to deceive me, setting one of the women here to pretend that she could get a message out to a friend. But I knew. I refused, and then they tried threats. That awful man, Sergius Palkavin, came to me and

ordered me to write a note to you saying where I was, and that I was in sore trouble. He reminded me that I was bound by my oath to obey his orders. Have you seen that man yet?"

"I have just left him."

"Then you know his power of suggesting force under gentle tones and a soft manner. I had heard much of him before, but if I had not I should have read him instantly. To him the life of a fellow creature is as nothnig. I knew that he was threatening me with death, and I resigned myself. I was waiting for it, and then—you came." She smiled as she said this, and I took her in my arms.

Presently I told her of my interview with Vodolski, the arrangements for the flight, how the news of her arrest had alarmed me, and how a letter from her had been brought to me.

"I did not write it. My one consolation was that you at least were safe. Oh, why did you come? You might have guessed it was a trap, and that the man was only misleading you!"

"He was not. I will tell you all about him directly. He was frank with me and warned me not to come."

"And yet you came!"

"We must fight it through together, Alma. There will be no more danger for me than for you; and we shall be stronger together than apart. Besides, I am already a fugitive from the police; and if we have to stay here awhile, it will at the worst be a secure hiding-place."

"You should not have come," she repeated. "You have no right to run into all this danger,

You cannot help me against the men in this house."

"That remains to be seen. What you have already told me—that you had made up your mind for the worst—makes it easier for us to face things. I will not pretend that matters are not serious, and it may still come to that worst. But in the meantime this is better than one of your prisons. Even if these men had not taken you to-day, you would have been taken by the police to-morrow, and then ——" I left the rest to her imagination.

"I had thought of that, and had made up my mind. But I did not tell you. I would not have faced the horrors of a prison. I could not." She spoke very deliberately and with intense earnestness.

"This is better than death, dearest!"

Her fingers tightened on mine. "If we could only hope, Paul," she replied, with a deep sigh.

"I hope. I don't intend to cease hoping till the last moment. I have a plan indeed. If these men seek to use me for their purposes, I will find a way to use them for ours." I sank my voice to a whisper. "They require me to join them, and to take the oath of obedience——"

"Don't do that. Do anything rather than that," she interposed, in a quick, eager whisper. "They have some very strong motive in bringing you into this, or they would not have taken all these steps."

"They have been ordered to do it by the leader, Antonin Gregov. He was in the house as the servant, Eikov, and himself did the deed. All these men believe it and boast of it, and I shall find means to get face to face with him and force the truth from him."

"But the risks of it!"

"Matters are too serious for us to count risks, Alma. But I tell you this to show you that I have hope. Nor is that all. I shall agree to join these men, but not until they force me with threats. They will do that. I know them. Then I shall be freer. Meanwhile, any hour may bring us help, or a chance to help ourselves."

"There will be no chance, I fear. The house is full of men and women, and every one of them is a spy."

"We have all to gain by delay, and nothing to lose."

She smiled. "For your sake I will try to hope, and at least we shall see one another."

I took her in my arms again, and our lips met, and we were thus locked in the all-forgetting embrace of love when the door opened suddenly.

It was the leader, Sergius Palkavin. He glanced at us searchingly in turn, and I thought I could detect a swiftly suppressed look of satisfaction as he saw that he had interrupted a love scene. It was upon our love that he depended for the success of his plan.

He apologised for his abrupt entrance and said that he had come to explain the arrangements he had made for me.

CHAPTER XIX.

"DEATH IS MY ONLY FRIEND."

THE house of the Terrorists was a very large one and furnished luxuriously. I learnt that it had been the residence of one of the wealthier members of the party who had given it up at the bidding of the leader, Antonin Gregov.

The hand of that man of mystery was everywhere. He had planned the big movement which was on the eve of accomplishment, and had sent Sergius Palkavin to Moscow to direct it, provided with most detailed instructions and endowed with full authority. By virtue of that authority Palkavin was rendered instant and unquestioning obedience.

Even the arrangements for Alma and myself had been made by Gregov. There was no show of force. Two excellent rooms were placed at my disposal, and I was free to wander over the building at will, but always under close surveillance. Wherever I went, one servant after another would appear, ostensibly engaged in household duties, but in reality watching me.

It was part of the plan that Alma and I should be allowed to communicate freely, and we took full

advantage of the permission. Three days passed without anything further being said about my joining the party, and Alma grew a little easier in mind. I encouraged the feeling in her, but I did not share it. My impression was that this show of consideration was intended to make me feel that they regarded me as a person of importance because of the service which they would require of me.

I questioned Gortoff, but he affected ignorance. "You are to join us," was all he would say.

"But you have a big coup on hand, how can I help or hinder it? I have not the power to do the one, nor the wish to do the other."

"You are wealthy. It may be that," he suggested.

"If money will buy our freedom, for heaven's sake name the amount and I will pay it gladly."

"I don't say it is that. May I tell Palkavin you will join us?"

"No. I am not a Russian."

"Until you are willing, nothing can be done. Gregov is growing impatient; a message came from him to-day. To-morrow, or the next day, you must decide."

"And if I refuse?"

"As Palkavin said, you will not refuse. If you do, Mademoiselle Kasslov will leave here for a prison with suggestive proofs of the charge against her."

"Are you soulless brutes to swear an innocent girl's life away in order to force my conversion to your cause?" I cried furiously.

"This is Gregov's doing, not ours. Our oath demands unconditional obedience to his orders, and the punishment of disobedience is death."

"Do you know why this man is so set on my joining you?"

"No. But no command of his is ever without a well-calculated purpose."

"Can you set me face to face with him, that I may know the truth?"

He smiled as if the suggestion were the merest foolishness. A rag-picker might as well have demanded an audience with the Czar. "Absolutely impossible. I myself have never seen him. No one here has, save Palkavin. You do not understand us."

"That's true enough," I replied with a dry laugh. "But I have heard it said that there is no Antonin Gregov; that he is no more than a name under which your leaders issue commands."

He fired at this. "That is a lie; a police lie, designed to slander the deliverer of the Russian people. He is coming here to Moscow, and in the hour of the glorious triumph which his genius has planned and will achieve for the people, he will avow himself and lead us in person. His face will be graven on our hearts then as his name is now. God bless Antonin Gregov!" he exclaimed passionately, as he dashed his right hand on high, his face radiant and his eyes aglow with the fire of enthusiasm.

It was useless to question him further. He was a fanatic in the cause which he regarded as Patriotism, so I said no more. I presumed that he would report what had passed between us, and looked for some immediate result. Nothing occurred that day, however.

But on the following afternoon, when I went to

Alma, I found her excited and troubled. "There is a crisis of some sort at hand, Paul," she said. "One of the men has been with me. He questioned me about you; whether you were prepared to join them; if I had been endeavouring to persuade you; and—much more about matters here." She broke off abruptly, and the last sentence was spoken with great hesitation. There was something behind.

"I hope you told him that you had been trying to induce me."

"No, I did not. I—I—oh, he was—he gave me to understand that something was about to happen."

"You are keeping something from me. Why?"

She dropped her eyes and her face crimsoned. "He was a brutal fellow and—and he insulted me, and frightened me horribly."

"Tell me."

"Well, he said that both our lives were in danger; but that he was our friend. He professed to pity me, and declared that if I would trust him he might be able to save us both, and that he would help us to escape perhaps——"

"Perhaps?"

"He didn't put the condition in so many words; but he spoke of his influence; and said how much he admired me for the courage I had shown, and—— Oh, Paul, I was never so shamed in my life."

"Do you know his name?"

"No. He told me he was second in authority here, and would soon be rich and powerful, and that his friends would be safe, whatever happened. But he warned me not to say a word to you of anything."

"Describe him."

My tone betrayed the feeling with which I heard this, and she put her hand on my arm. "You must not do anything, Paul. He is a dangerous man."

"Describe him," I said again.

"He is a red-haired man with small dark eyes that bore into one like gimlets. A common fellow in looks and speech and manners. Oh, a brute"; and she shuddered.

"A brute, is he?"

Alma uttered a cry of alarm as a harsh voice broke in upon us. We both turned to find the man she had described standing by the door staring at us, with a look of devilish malice on his ugly, sneering face.

"If you are the man, yes," I said hotly.

"What has she told you?" he demanded truculently, as he came nearer to us.

"Just what you said to her," I answered between my teeth.

"You are wanted below. Go!" he said, pointing to the door.

"Come, Alma. We will tell the others of this fellow's conduct."

He put himself in her way. "Not the girl. You only are to go. I have been ordered to speak to her alone," he replied to me.

"I shan't leave you here alone with her. Come, Alma."

"Go, I tell you!" he cried fiercely, and laid his hand on Alma to prevent her leaving the room. She drew away from him, and, as he grabbed at her again, I pushed between them and shouldered him out of the way.

"Go on downstairs, Alma," I said, and faced the fellow.

"You'll disobey my orders, will you?" he growled, and his hand went to his pocket. But before he could draw a weapon I sent him staggering backwards and followed Alma out of the room, locking the door behind me.

A couple of servants appeared, from nowhere, as usual, and several others came running upstairs, attracted by the noise of the scuffle.

"Take us to M. Palkavin," I said; and seeing that we were not making any attempt to escape, we were taken down to the room below where I had had my first interview with the leaders.

I described what had passed, and Alma repeated what the man had said to her. While she was speaking the man himself entered.

"We will deal with that later on," replied Palkavin. "There is a more serious matter in hand. We must have your decision about yourself, Mr. Enderby. You have had some days in which to consider whether you will become a member of our party. What have you decided?"

"I have not decided. I must have more time."

"We cannot give you any longer. If you take the oath of obedience there is work for you to do; and it cannot be delayed."

"What work is that?"

"It will be told to you after your oath."

"And if I refuse?"

"Mademoiselle Kasslov will no longer be protected against arrest by the police on the charge against her. You will understand all that that means when

I tell you that the examination of the late General Kasslov's body has been made by other doctors, who declare that death was due to poison. Count Kaspar has been arrested, and the whole country is being scoured to find Mademoiselle Kasslov. You can judge what will be her fate if they are allowed to find her."

"But you yourselves all know that she had nothing to do with it," I exclaimed indignantly.

He passed the protest by as if I had not spoke. "The fact that you yourself provided money for the escape of our comrade Eskatoff has also been proved, and your subsequent acts in attempting to hide vital evidence is, of course, perfectly well known."

"Then you mean to hand me over to the police as well."

"I have not said so. At present it would be too dangerous to allow you to leave our custody."

He paused, and I glanced round the room at the others. Every face was set and as feelingless as metal. Had they been sentencing me to death, they could not have looked sterner. It flashed across me that they meant me to die if I refused to take the oath.

"Is my death to be the result of the refusal?" I asked.

I felt Alma tremble as I put the question, and she strained her eyes on Palkavin.

"It would be too dangerous to allow you to be at large," he repeated, in a tone both deep and stern. "Your decision?" he asked, after a pause.

I clenched my hands until the nails all but pierced

the flesh as I faced the alternative thus thrust upon me with such grim suddenness.

A dungeon and the horrors of torture for Alma and death for myself, or the taking of an oath which would pledge me even to acts of violence for the cause of these desperate men?

During the time I was striving to force myself to a decision, not one of the men in the room made a sign. They sat as if buried in thought and exchanged no word even with one another. The only man who showed feeling was the brute who had insulted Alma, and he expressed it only in furtive glances at her and at me in turn. Looks of stealthy admiration for her and of open venomous hate for me.

I noticed these with a sort of detached sense, just as I observed little trifles in the room: the shape of this man's head, the prominent nose of another, the dirty condition of a third man's head and face, the marks on the blotting-pad in front of Palkavin. I can call the whole scene up to this day, for every detail was indelibly impressed on my memory.

And at the same time my mind was busily, almost fiercely intent upon the problem to be decided, grim speculations as to the manner in which I should die in the event of refusal, and gruesome searching thoughts of the tortures to which Alma would be subjected at the hands of the police when they sought to force a confession from her.

Then I recalled her words to me—that she would not live to face them. It was thus the life or death of us both which hung on my decision.

The long silence was broken at length by Palkavin.

I caught his eyes bent upon me twice, as if he read the struggle through which I was passing. "You can have an hour, but your answer must be ready then," he announced.

A sigh of relief broke from Gortoff and was echoed by one or two of the others, and Alma and I went out together. I turned into the first room we reached and her first words told me her wishes.

"You will not take the oath, Paul. You must not. I am sure there is some terrible purpose behind. You shall not do it for my sake."

"You are very brave," I answered.

"I am quite resigned. I would rather die than that you should be driven into this fresh danger. You must not do it. I am not afraid to die."

"If death were all that I feared for you ——"

She interrupted me with a smile. "It is all. I have the means with me. I have foreseen that it might come to this. When they arrested me at my house I brought the means with me," and she took a scent bottle from her pocket.

She was very pale, but wonderfully calm.

I detected the odour of violets.

"That is scent," I said.

"It is poison," she said simply, in the same calm tone.

Our eyes met, and she smiled. "You are braver than I," I declared. I could not look death in the face with that cold, deliberate resignation. I shrank from the prospect of it. The longing to live was strong within me; my love for her made me a coward, and the thought of all that life held for us if we could but escape from the net which held

us filled me with a desire to live, passionate, intense and overpowering.

Alma saw the struggle and read me by the instinct of love. "It is best so, Paul. It is the only chance, to die together. It would be so much harder to die alone."

"We will not die," I exclaimed vehemently. "I will find a way out, even yet. It cannot be too late."

"There is no hope. None—save in this." She drew the stopper from the bottle as she spoke. "I am not afraid while you are with me. And if I go alone it will at least break the hold which these men have over you. Hold my hand, dearest."

I took the hand which held the poison bottle. "You must not, Alma."

"Ah, you are cruel to stop me. Kiss me, and let me go with the touch of your lips still warm on mine."

My grasp tightened on the poison, and with the other hand I drew her close to me and pressed my lips to hers. "I cannot bear it, Alma. I cannot, my dearest!"

She gazed pleadingly into my eyes. "Paul! Dearest! My love!" she murmured. "Think from what horrors I shall be spared—and so easily. I am not afraid with you at my side."

"I cannot. I cannot. My God, I cannot let you die," I cried passionately, rent by a thousand conflicting emotions.

Keeping her eyes fixed upon mine, she sought to disengage the hand which held the poison, and when I would not let it go, an expression of agony

" She stepped back and eluded me, and raised the bottle to her lips."

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crept into them, until she closed them and let her head sink.

"Think how much more cruel life will be for me than death. Death is a friend, dearest. Save you, the only friend left to me in the world. Would you keep me from the only shelter that is now open? But as you will. If you wish it, I must live."

She made as if to release her hold of the poison, and then with a sudden movement slipped her hand from my grasp and stepped back. "You have made me deceive even you, dearest."

"For the love of God, stop, Alma!" I cried, as I sprang toward her.

She stepped back and eluded me, and raised the bottle to her lips.

But it did not reach them. A look of infinite horror showed in her eyes, and I saw that they were strained past me over my shoulder at something behind. The hand that held the poison stayed motionless.

CHAPTER XX.

MY APPOINTED TASK.

"IF you attempt to drink that, mademoiselle, you will see him killed before your eyes."

It was the soft voice of Sergius Palkavin. He had entered the room by a secret door, and I turned to find him holding a revolver close to my head.

We stood thus for some seconds, as still as statues; and then the bottle slipped from Alma's nerveless fingers, and she fell to the ground, unconscious.

I laid her on a couch, and Palkavin fetched some brandy. I got a few drops between her livid lips and bathed her white brow and chafed her hands. Palkavin remained in the room until she recovered and summoned two of the women to take her to her room, and ordered that she was never to be left alone, night or day, except when I was with her.

"I will carry her up," I said.

He nodded assent. "Return to me here at once," he added.

I picked her up in my arms and took her to her room, followed closely by the two women.

"You have been so cruel, Paul. You do not understand," she murmured, as I laid her on the couch in her room. "It would have been so easy.

And now——" A despairing sigh finished the broken sentence.

I could not find words to reply. I had done right —the only thing I could have done, of course; but the sight of her despairing misery unmanned me, and as I left the room to return to Palkavin, my eyes were dim with tears of agony.

He saw how deeply moved I was; and with a tact which surprised me, at once set my mind at rest on one point in regard to Alma. "You heard my order to the women, Mr. Enderby. I have questioned Nicolai, the man you accused, and that order was the result. So long as that lady is with us, her honour is absolutely safe."

"I will settle that score with him," I replied.

"No. That is for us. It is not about that I wish to speak with you. I heard all that passed between you two while you were in this room. Had you not prevented her from killing herself, I should have intervened before."

"It would have been more merciful if you had."

"Mercy is not the main consideration which determines my acts. You love this girl, and you wish to save her. There is but one way. Throw in your lot with us; take the oath of obedience, obey that, and I pledge you my word, and I speak this in the name of our great leader, Antonin Gregov, her safety shall be our special care."

He paused, but I did not reply.

"I have grave news for you about her," he continued. "By the police her guilt is accepted as indisputable. You know, or at least you have heard, what goes on in our prisons under the curse of the

present Government, the tortures, the floggings, the outrages, all the damnable horrors which are practised upon men and women and children alike. It is already resolved that this girl shall be put to the torture to extract the truth. It is from that you have to save her, if you will."

"There is more," he went on, when I remained silent. "The love of life is strong in you. You are rich, you love, you look forward to a life of happiness in the country in which you may thank your God you were born. Yet I tell you solemnly that if you still refuse, you will die as surely as if you had sipped the draught of death which was then held to your lips. That is the order of our leader; and our own death would be the penalty of disobedience."

"Why are you so set on this? How can your cause be helped by this persecution of a man who is not of your country?"

"I cannot answer that except that I am obeying my orders."

"Do you believe I am likely to attach any such importance as you think to an oath drawn from me by the threat of death?"

He smiled confidently. "The oath once taken is never broken. The sanction of it is—death."

I stood a moment thinking. "Gortoff suggested to me to-day that you need money. Will you name any sum in return for which you will let us go?"

He shook his head impatiently. "We are wasting time. I must have your answer—now."

Once again I clenched my hands in the strain of infinite perplexity, but if Alma's life was to be saved, there was no other way.

"I will take it," I said, my voice hoarse and low with emotion.

He thrust out his hand and clasped mine.

"I am glad. From my heart I am glad. Come. We will go to the rest. I have watched your struggle, and know what this has cost you. Had you yielded easily, it might not have been well for you."

He turned and led the way to the room where the other men were waiting, and immediately announced that I had decided to take the oath.

Gortoff sprang up and grasped my hand warmly; and the others with, one exception, followed his example. The exception was Nicolai, the fellow who had insulted Alma.

Palkavin administered the oath, which bound me to set the cause of the people before all other considerations in life, and pledged me to implicit obedience to the commands of the leaders and to hold my life at their absolute disposal. I was then initiated into certain signs and passwords, and once again sworn to absolute secrecy as to these.

Then followed a short discussion of the plans of the leaders. The first movement was to be a general strike of all the workers; and a large quantity of arms had been smuggled secretly into the city and stored in depôts, ready for distribution the moment the word was given by Antonin Gregov.

Two other leaders were coming from him that day, Ivan Manre and Maxim Pabst, with further detailed plans; and it was expected that almost immediately after their arrival Gregov would send the word which was to set everything in motion.

But in regard to this, Palkavin spoke of one deed

which had first to be accomplished by the local leaders; and as he and some of the rest glanced at me when referring to it, I jumped to the conclusion that it was for some such purpose I had been dragged into the affair.

A few minutes later he turned to me. "Do you think that Mademoiselle Kasslov would be sufficiently recovered to be able to come to us?"

"Probably. Why do you wish to see her?" I asked in some surprise.

"We have to deal with the matter of her statement against Nicolai."

"I will go and see; but I do not know that she wishes the matter to go farther."

"That is for us, not for her, to decide."

As I turned from the room I observed that Nicolai was as white as death. I went up to Alma's room and found her reading; and as I entered, the two women who were with her left the room.

She was still very pale, but had recovered her composure. "What has happened?" she asked.

"I have taken the oath."

"Oh, that I should have brought you to this!" she exclaimed with a shuddering sigh of despair.

"I had a talk with Palkavin. There was no alternative."

"What will they make you do?"

"I don't know yet. I have not been told. But they wish to see you in regard to that brute Nicolai. They take a serious view of it."

"I would rather not say any more."

"I told them so; but their reply was that that was for them to decide. I think you had better come down. They are not men to be trifled with."

She rose and, as we were leaving the room, held me a moment. "Did you get that—that scent bottle?"

"No. Palkavin took it."

"Ah, you were cruel, Paul!" she murmured.

"No. A thousand times no. As a matter of fact, he had overheard all that passed between us, and he was ready to stop you if I had not. But, believe me, I am confident we shall live to escape from all this."

"I do not wish to hope. I would rather be resigned. Far better could we have died together than that you should be in this terrible danger."

"I will find a way out. You will see. I have your love as an inspiration," I whispered, as I took her in my arms and kissed her.

When we reached the room below, Nicolai was facing Palkavin at the table, and two men were standing on guard by the door. Palkavin pointed to a chair for Alma, and I stood behind her.

"I wish you to repeat what you told us before, mademoiselle; and be good enough to repeat every word that Nicolai uttered to you, so far as you can remember, and describe every act of his to you."

"I do not wish to cause any trouble," she replied, after a pause.

"She has lied, and she knows it," burst in Nicolai. "That's why——"

With a single flashing glance Palkavin silenced him. "You can speak presently. Now please"; and he turned again to Alma, who was still reluctant to speak. "Am I to understand that you admit that your story was not true?" he asked sternly.

"Oh, no. Every word was true; but I do not wish to cause trouble."

"You must either retract or repeat it. There is no middle course."

"You had better say what passed, Alma. All that you told me," I said; and then she gave way, and repeated what she had told me.

"You must tell us how he insulted you, mademoiselle."

She glanced at Nicolai with a look of loathing, and then her face crimsoned. "He tried to force himself upon me; he seized my hand and kissed it; and when I tried to draw it away, he sought to force me to let him kiss my lips, vowing that he would get me away from this house to-night, if I would listen to him. I screamed, and one of the women, Paula, hurried in to my help. She will tell you that. He left the room then, but returned soon afterwards on the pretence that he had a message from you, and begged me on his knees not to say a word of what had passed."

"You did not speak of all this to us or to Mr. Enderby?"

"I was afraid. I feared lest in his rage, Mr. Enderby would do something violent, and so anger you all; and again I feared to make an enemy of a man who was in such authority here."

Palkavin turned to Nicolai. "Do you question her?" he asked.

"The whole thing is a lie," he replied sullenly "She was imploring me to help her to escape, and with a woman's cunning has turned the thing round because I refused."

"We will excuse you, mademoiselle," said Palkavin, without a word of comment on her statement or

Nicolai's denial. "Bring Paula here," he added to one of the others when Alma had left the room.

We waited in silence until the woman came. She confirmed Alma, and added that Nicolai had asked her afterwards to deny that Alma had screamed.

"Do you ask any questions?" he asked Nicolai again.

"The one woman is in league with the other. We know how they hang together. This woman hates me, and has lied like the other."

Palkavin sent the woman away. "Now, what do you say, Nicolai?"

The latter glanced round at the rest and read in their looks that they were against him to a man. He thought for a few moments, passing his hand across his forehead.

"You all know me well, and what I have done for the cause," he began, speaking slowly at first, as if uncertain of the line to take. "With the exception of Sergius himself, I challenge any man to show a better record than mine. I appeal to that record now, because I would have it in your thoughts while I tell you the real truth of this exaggerated trifle. The girl, Kasslov, implored me to help her, and partly to see what her meaning was, and to get from her the truth about her acts, and partly because I am only human, like the rest of you, and can be fooled by a pretty face, I listened. She appealed first to my pity, and then to my passions. I am no block of stone; and when she threw herself into my arms and begged me with tears and promises to help her——"

"You lie, you dog!" I exclaimed furiously.

"Patience," said Palkavin, with lifted hand.

"When she did that I admit I kissed her. There is no crime in kissing a pretty wench, I suppose, or we should all be criminals. I told her she was in no danger here, and when the hour of our triumph came, I would see what I could do to help her. At that she turned on me like a vixen, swearing that she would be revenged; and clinging to me, she screamed and brought in the other woman, who was waiting near in league with her. Am I to be hounded down for what was no more than a harmless jest, after all I have done?" and he went back to a recital of his services for the cause, and enlarged upon them at great length.

Not a word of comment was made by anyone on the statement. When he had finished, Palkavin said, in a cold, judicial tone: "The charge is that Nicolai was false to his oath of obedience in offering to procure this girl's escape. We will vote. How do you vote, Ladislas?" he asked the man nearest to him.

A moment of tense dead silence followed, and Nicolai strained his eyes on the man who was to give the first vote, the muscles of his face twitching restlessly.

The man rose. "I do not believe Nicolai. He is guilty," he said, and sat down again.

The question was repeated to every man in turn; and there was not one who took the opposite view.

"We are all agreed, Nicolai," announced Palkavin. "You know the penalty."

Nicolai was now grey and sweat-bedabbled. He looked round the room, and for a moment I thought

he was about to attempt some violent resistance but he restrained himself, and with a heavy sigh obeyed Palkavin's gesture and left the room in the custody of the two men by the door.

"What is the penalty?" I asked a man sitting next to me.

"There is only one penalty for a liar and a traitor; and he is both. Death," he answered grimly. "We have long suspected him."

I caught my breath, appalled by this proof of how lightly these implacable men held human life. I was now one of them, and my first act had been to join in condemning a fellow-creature to death. I sickened at the mere thought of it.

I was roused by Palkavin calling to me by name.

"There is one thing remaining to be done—to tell you the commands of our leader, Antonin Gregov, in regard to you. A great mission has been appointed for you. A great stroke for the cause of the people. We know you have the courage, and your loyalty will be tested by the zeal you display."

He paused, and I waited with bated breath to learn why I had been brought into the conspiracy with so much trouble.

"Baron Vodolski has been placed on the list of the condemned, and you, comrade Enderby, have been appointed to carry out the sentence. It is Antonin Gregov's special and peremptory command."

The room reeled round me as I heard this, and a hot passionate refusal sprang to my lips.

But I forced the words back. My oath bound me to implicit obedience, and I had just seen for myself the penalty of refusal.

CHAPTER XXI.

A GLIMMER OF HOPE.

JUST after Palkavin had announced the monstrous task which the man of mystery, Antonin Gregov, had allotted to me, and I was struggling with the conflict of emotions roused by the command, the attention of all present was drawn away from me by what I regarded as a fortunate accident.

The words were scarcely out of his lips when the fellow who had been the first to cast his vote against Nicolai slipped with a groan from his chair to the ground in a fit. Some minutes were occupied in attending to him, and in the end he was carried out of the room by several of the others.

This incident gave me the time I needed to collect my scattered wits. I need not say that not for one second did I contemplate compliance with the infamous order issued to me with such special insistence. I would far sooner have laid hands on my own life than commit murder in that or any other cause.

But I recognised the prudence, the necessity, indeed, of making a show of acquiescence. I had two objects in view. I must gain time at any cost, in the hope that some opportunity would arise for

me to get Alma out of the hands of her present gaolers. I saw that I could gain delay by feigning obedience to the leaders, and then inventing some plausible difficulty in getting an interview with Vodolski.

That course might enable me to accomplish my second object. If I could put matters off until Antonin Gregov arrived, I might succeed in getting face to face with him in order to find out the truth about General Kasslov's assassination.

In the meantime it might not be difficult to assume the part of a Terrorist with sufficient realism to mislead men whose intense earnestness in the cause would make them indifferent judges of acting. But I must act with great caution; and in this respect Palkavin's words to me just after I had agreed to take the oath of obedience gave me a cue.

"Had you yielded easily it might not have been well for you," he had said; and thus any too easy compliance now might lay me open to a similar suspicion of misleading them. I would not yield easily, therefore.

It would be playing with fire, of course. But every path open to me at such a juncture must necessarily be crowded with risks. My own life and, what was of infinitely greater concern to me, Alma's surrender to the police, were the stakes in the hazardous game. I could not afford to count the risks too carefully, nor indeed to be squeamish about the means to be adopted.

As soon as the man in the fit had been carried out of the room, Palkavin signed to me to take the

vacant chair next to him. "You will lose no time in carrying out your task," he said.

"If I carry it out at all. I have not yet decided."

"Your oath," he reminded me curtly.

"I may prefer the penalty of refusing. I am not a Russian, like the rest of you; and as I lack the motive which inspires you all, the thought of such a deed is abhorrent to me. The task should have been assigned to another."

"There is a reason. Baron Vodolski has taken alarm. He has surrounded himself with a barrier of guards, impenetrable and ever alert. Attempts have been made to gain an audience, and every one has failed. But you can get to him readily. You are his friend, and would not be suspected."

The cunning of Antonin Gregov's hand was in that thought, surely. I was to use the pretence of friendship to do murder; and was to be driven to do it by the pressure of my fear for Alma, and with my own death as the penalty of refusal. Was I wrong to endeavour to fight cunning with cunning? "You could have sent someone to him in my name," I suggested.

"It was tried and failed. You are believed to be out of Russia; suspicion was roused and our comrade was arrested."

"Then how should I be likely to escape capture? It is but a choice of whether I would prefer to die at your hands or as a convicted murderer. I am an Englishman, and your cause is little to me. You have forced me to take this oath; why, then, should I have this man's blood on my head, when death is the certain result?" and I continued to talk in this strain.

"I expected something of this from you. But it is our leader's command; and there is Mademoiselle Kasslov."

I could tell from this that I had done the right thing to protest, and that a too easy consent would have roused suspicion. I affected to be moved by his reference to Alma. "What guarantee have I that even if I were to consent to do this, she would not become the prey of some other scoundrel such as Nicolai?" I asked, after a pause of frowning thought.

"Her safety will be our special care. She will be at liberty to leave the country, and will be assisted. That is the order, provided you do your part."

"There may be another Nicolai," I murmured.

"You have seen the punishment of his act."

"The punishment was for his disobedience, not for the insult. I must have time to think. There is another thing. Mademoiselle's innocence must be established beyond question."

"You are not in a position to make terms. You have taken the oath."

"I am in a position to decide how I will die. You cannot do this thing without me. You have admitted that. Take my life if you will, and then find some other means to carry out your leader's orders—if you can."

I could feel that I was taking a safe line with him; and the very candour with which I stated the considerations which would have influenced me had I for an instant contemplated the commission of the deed, made just the impression I desired. He believed that the one thing to weigh with me was Alma's safety.

His next words, spoken after a long pause, showed this. "If mademoiselle's innocence is established beyond doubt, will you obey the command?"

"How can it be proved?"

"Her father was killed by Antonin Gregov himself. He is coming to Moscow, and he will avow his act. We have known from the first that it was his glorious deed."

"You mean, he will avow it, if your cause succeeds. But what if it fail?"

"You speak with more than a lawyer's caution," he replied, with much more impatience than he had yet shown.

"I speak with the caution of a man whose life is the stake for which he ventures. I will have everything clear, or you may do what you will," I answered with an assumption of recklessness. "You forget that I am no willing agent."

"I do not wish to have to bear it constantly in mind," he retorted, with a threatening look.

I shrugged my shoulders. "I am not to be threatened. I care nothing for what you remember or what you forget. If I do this thing, it will be to secure Mademoiselle Kasslov's safety; and until I have the proof that that will be secured, I will not move so much as a finger. This is a bargain, and I have the right to know that your side of it will be performed."

There was more in this than mere recklessness. My belief was that they regarded the assassination of Vodolski as vital to their plans, and were convinced that no one but myself could do it. If this was so, it would be an invaluable guide in framing

my course of action; and his reply served to prove me that I was right.

After thinking a moment, he took up a paper. "I have it here over his own signature. You shall see it"; and he put into my hands a letter from Antonin Gregov himself.

With what intense interest I read it may be easily conceived. The first part contained a number of directions in regard to the forthcoming rising, and dealt particularly with the arming of the workers; the command for the "execution" of Vodolski followed, with the mention of my name and an impressive insistence upon the vital importance of the deed; and the conclusion ran as follows:—

"It is of urgent importance that the real truth as to the death of the tyrant Kasslov should be known to all our friends, that it was my hand which killed him, and that I did it in person because of the former failures. I shall declare this at the moment of my arrival. I am resolved that this movement shall be crowned with success, and shall give my life to win that success. I shall not survive a defeat. It was as a step toward this great victory that I killed the tyrant at the risk of my life. If I devote my life to my fellow-countrymen's cause, I look for the same devotion from them in the coming struggle. . . . By such devotion alone can our freedom be won and the cause of the people prevail. Victory or Death. That must be our watchword. ANTONIN GREGOV."

In view of Palkavin's impatience, I affected to be greatly impressed by the letter. Indeed, it was little

affectation, for the deliberate admission of his act moved me considerably. "When must my task be done?" I asked, as I returned the remarkable document.

"Without loss of time. You will do it?"

"I must first consider how it can be done with safety. I have much to live for, and shall not throw my life away. By to-morrow I will have a plan. But I must learn what these new arrangements at his office are, and I cannot go to him in this garb. I should not be admitted."

I said this in order to see if I was to be at liberty to leave the house.

He gave me a very searching look, but raised no objection. "It is for you to settle the means, but you understand that no consideration for your own life must stand in the way of success."

"I am not likely to forget."

With that the conference ended, and I went off to consider my plan of action.

My intention was very simple. I meant to use my freedom of action to secure Alma's escape from the house and to remain in hiding with her somewhere in the city until we could both get away. Urgent as was the desire to secure the death of Baron Vodolski, it was not probable that the uprising of the populace would be long delayed even if he were not killed; and when the troubles broke out in the city, we should have to find our chance to escape.

Until that happy moment came, if it was ever to come, we should carry our lives in our hands. The Terrorists, on the one hand, would hunt us down on account of my betrayal, and the police, on the other,

were already searching high and low for Alma. In the meantime, I had to reckon that my own movements would be closely watched by Palkavin's spies.

I went up to Alma and told her what had passed and what my intentions were in regard to ourselves, and laid particular stress on the fact that I had read Gregov's admission of the murder of her father. If we could only remain in hiding until that avowal had been openly made, she would be absolutely cleared of all suspicion. This I knew would give her a foundation on which to build up hope once more.

While I was speaking to her, Marie, one of the women set to watch Alma, entered. She had been on some errand for Alma, and still wore a long cloak and her head covering. It was of a very unusual shape and material, and I observed that it clung about her face to such an extent as to conceal in some part her features. It suggested an idea.

"That is quaint headwear," I said to her.

"It is the garb of my village," she replied, pleased by my notice of it. "I always wear it."

"I have never seen it before. It is becoming," I added, turning to Alma.

The woman took it off and handed it to me, and I then saw that in the shape of the face and the colouring she was not unlike Alma. I examined it and passed it on to Alma, and started to talk of the curious forms of peasant dress which I had observed in my travels about the country districts.

The woman was gratified by the attention, and told us that no one else about the place dressed in the same style. She was known by it and proud of it.

"You must get that cloak and headgear," I said

to Alma when the woman had left the room. "You saw how it helped to conceal her face. It will help you to get away openly, and, if need be, in full daylight. Marie is about your height, your colouring is alike; study her figure and arrange so that you can make yours like hers. To-morrow evening we will make the attempt. Tell her in the presence of the other woman that you will need her to go out on some such errand as that to-day, and that she is to come to you in readiness. I will be here at the time, and you will go in her dress. By that time I will have found some place in which you can lie concealed in the city."

"But it will bring her into such trouble," she objected.

"No. I will arrange that. We will take it from her by force."

"Dare we? It would be discovered at once."

"We dare not stay here. A few minutes will be enough for our purpose. I will take care that there is a carriage close at hand ready for us. Have courage and all will go well. But I know you have the courage."

"It almost frightens me."

"It must not. If we were to fail, we should not be worse off than we are. Think it all over carefully and plan every detail. I shall, of course, see you again between now and then. I am free to leave the house, and am going at once to set about matters. Have no fear; to-morrow we shall be out of this, and then it will be no more than a game of hide-and-seek for a few days at most. We have wit enough between us to win such a game."

I spoke very lightly; and when I left soon afterwards she was smiling, with more hope in her eyes than I had seen there for some days past.

I was to put the wits I had spoken of to the first test at once, I found. Gortoff was waiting for me below, and had obviously been told off to accompany me. I could not express anything but pleasure at the arrangement, of course.

"Come along. If I am to have a spy with me, there is no one I would rather have than you, Gortoff," I said.

He gave me a rather sour look in response, and I left the house with him, wondering uneasily how I was to shake him off.

If I was always to have a spy at my heels, escape would be a sheer impossibility.

CHAPTER XXII.

A MOMENT OF CRISIS.

"WHERE are you going first, Enderby?" asked Gortoff, as we turned into the street.

"The first thing I have to do is to get accustomed to the feeling that every man I meet may be a secret agent on the prowl for me," I replied, with a smile.

"But that's not the case, surely?"

"Certainly it is. I was to have been put across the frontier, and Bertloff warned me that if I returned I should be arrested at once."

"Does Palkavin know this?" he asked, coming to an abrupt halt.

"Don't know and don't care. I have means of getting all the information I need without any serious risk; but I frankly admit that your presence with me will increase the difficulty. As soon as I have shaken off this abominable sense of being spied on, I am going to Grovski."

"Going to whom?" he exclaimed in astonishment.

"Grovski, the police agent. You know him, of course?"

"By heaven, but you're a cool hand! You mustn't go to him, man."

"Don't be frightened, Gortoff. I'm not going to betray you all. I can read that thought in your face. I have made him my friend in regard to the other matter—the murder business, I mean—and he will tell me exactly how things stand. I shall get from him also the inside information as to the changes which have been made in Vodolski's arrangements, and find out how I can best get an interview with him."

"If you are seen going to such a man as Grovski, there will be all sorts of talk about it."

"I can't help that. If I have to do this infernal thing at all, I shall do it in my own way. And I'll be absolutely frank with you. If I find that I can't do it in such a way as to secure my escape afterwards, I shan't do it."

"You are really going to do it then?"

I stopped, and put my hand on his shoulder and stared him in the eyes. "Look here, Gortoff, you saved my life once, and I haven't forgotten it. But if you yourself stood between Alma Kasslov and freedom, I'd shoot you down like a dog. That's my motive in this, not your infernal cause. I don't care two burnt matches for that; but I'm going to pull her out of this mess or lose my own life in trying. Now you have it."

He was sufficiently convinced of my earnestness, and we walked some distance before he said any more. "You'll have to be careful."

"To hell with being careful. Except to save my own skin and Alma Kasslov's, I've no call to be careful. I am going to Grovski, and if you don't like it, we'll go straight back to Palkavin and I'll

tell him what I mean to do, and that I'm not such a driftwood idiot as to take you or anyone else to Grovski with me."

"I shall have to report that you——"

"That'll do," I broke in. "We'll go back"; and I turned on my heel and went back to the house. I walked straight into the room to Palkavin, and found him in conference with a couple of men I had not seen before.

"I've thrown the whole thing up," I said bluntly. "You can do as you will."

All three men started at this statement, Palkavin showing more concern than I had ever noticed in him before.

"This is Paul Enderby, our new comrade," he said to his companions. "You know the great mission entrusted to him." At this they showed some excitement and stared at me with fresh interest. "What is the matter?" he asked me.

"You sent me out with a nurse—Gortoff, you know—and you ought to have added the baby carriage and the swaddling clothes as well"; and I laughed contemptuously, as if in a mighty temper.

"These are our comrades, Ivan Manre and Maxim Pabst. They have come from our leader with his latest commands."

"I don't care a hang who they are nor where they come from. I tell you I've done with the thing, and you can deal with me as you please."

"Explain your meaning."

"When I started, Gortoff came with me, as I tell you. I told him that my first step would be to see Grovski, the police agent, and he almost fainted in

consequence. He wanted to go with me to hear what I said; then he told me I must not do anything of the sort, and a whole lot more, and that he ought to report to you. Of course, I turned on my heel and came back to tell you point blank that if I'm not to be trusted to do the thing in my own way, I won't do it at all. And I mean that, every syllable of it. If I'm not to take such measures as I think best for my own safety, I'll see you all at the devil before I stir another finger."

"We must know what the measures are that you speak of," he replied.

"Then you'd better get somebody else to do it," I snapped back angrily, as I flopped on a chair with my hands thrust deep in my pockets and stared at them. I knew the strength of the cards I held. Palkavin had admitted that no one else was likely to be able to get access to Vodolski, and Antonin Gregov's own letter had shown me the importance attached to my part of the affair. My policy was, therefore, to bluff them into a belief that I was reckless of the consequences.

It was a good bluff. Palkavin's manner showed me that. "I need not ask you if you have counted the cost of this," he said sternly. But there was a note of uneasiness in the tone which he could not wholly conceal.

"Of course I've counted it," I replied; "but I have to count it also in the other case. I don't pretend to obey the command from my own love of your cause, nor even because I took that oath. If I do it, it will be for the reason that I can escape the penalty. Save my life, that is. But where's the

gain to me, if I'm to lose it in tackling Vodolski? And how am I do to that, if I'm to have a pack of hounds at my heels? I tell you bluntly now, that if I'm not to do the thing in my own way, I shan't attempt to do it at all. And that's all about it."

There was reason behind this, and he saw it. He whispered to his two companions for a moment, and then asked what I had meant about Grovski.

"He's my man, that's all. I've bought him; and if I go about it the right way I shall get all I want out of him. But you don't suppose he'd open his lips if Gortoff or anyone else was with me," I exclaimed with a scoff.

This statement got well home, and a long conference followed in which all three of them joined in questioning me closely about the police agent. I explained my relations with him fully, and how he had acted when he was to have seen me across the frontier, and in this way gained my end.

When I went out next time I was unaccompanied.

It was now dusk, and I felt less ill at ease than in the full daylight. I took means to assure myself that Palkavin was keeping faith with me and had not put someone to dog me secretly. Not that I cared. I had told him where I was going, and had nothing to hide on that score. All I needed was to obtain a secret interview with Grovski; and as soon as I had satisfied myself that I was not being shadowed, I went straight to his house and asked for him, giving the name of Vossler, as we had agreed, and the pretext that I wished to see him about some prints I had for sale.

I had to wait a little time for him, and remained

in the passage. He let himself in, and thus saw me before he had received the message. I had my cap on pulled well down over my eyes, and for the moment he failed to recognise me.

"What is it?" he asked sharply.

"My name's Vossler," I answered, in a gruffish tone, as I got up.

He had evidently forgotten the name he had mentioned on the train at random. "Well, what do you want with me?" he asked again, in a sharper tone.

I took off my cap. "I called about those prints," I said, in my own voice.

"Great heavens!" he exclaimed, in astonishment. Then he recollected himself. "I remember now. Come in here"; and he led me into a room close by. "I thought you had really gone," he said in a low tone, when he had shut the door. "What has happened? I didn't know you in that get-up."

"It isn't what has happened, but what is going to happen that matters. I am in desperate trouble, and want your help."

"It's very dangerous. I got back last night and reported that I had seen you across the frontier and left you at Königsberg about to sail for England. No suspicion was raised at the barrier. I said that you were train-sick, and kept that up until we were close there. I showed my papers, and no questions were asked. I went on to Königsberg and booked your passage."

"Good," I said, and I handed him over twice the amount of the payment I had promised him. "Now about the murder charge. How have matters gone?"

He told me fully; and what he said confirmed Palkavin's statement. Alma's disappearance had been taken for flight and had been regarded as the strongest confirmation of her guilt; the hue and cry had been raised, but the belief was now entertained that I had in some way managed to get her out of the country. Baron Vodolski was mad about it; and the whole city had been ransacked in search of her since my supposed departure.

Count Kaspar was in prison; Madame de Courtennes had returned and had been arrested; and the girl Fedora had been put to the question, and had confessed to certain matters which had strengthened the theory of the police—that she and the others in the house at the time of the murder had been in league together to commit the crime. I was held to have been an accessory after the fact, and agents were to be sent to follow me to London, if necessary, with a view to my being brought back. Pleasant news to hear, under the circumstances.

"Well, they haven't got me yet anyway; but I'm not sure that I'm not in a worse mess than if they had," I replied. "But I shall keep my end up as long as I can. You'll help me?"

"All I can, secretly; but, frankly, if I were to see you when any of our people were by, I should be obliged to arrest you."

"I'll take my chance of that. What I want you to do is to tell where I and another"—and I looked meaningly at him—"can lie low here in the city for a few days."

"It's a terrible risk, Mr. Enderby," he said nervously.

"Well, for one day then. I'll shift for myself after that. To-morrow night; and I want a carriage to be waiting at Pultowa monument from seven o'clock." I took out my money again, and laid five hundred roubles on the table.

He looked very troubled, but his eyes lighted at the sight of the money. Slowly he took out his pocket-book and wrote an address, and handed it to me. "It's not a nice place, but it's safe, and I judge you can take care of yourself, if there is any trouble."

"That's all I want now. If I need anything later on, Vossler will write you again about those prints. But don't forget the name this time."

"I am not going to forget all this easily," he replied with a deep sigh of trouble.

"One would think you were in the mess instead of me, Grovski. But I'll tell you one thing. I know who committed that murder, and all Moscow will know it, in the course of a few days. I only have to wait for that."

He agreed to have the carriage for me at the time and place I fixed, and I think he was extremely glad when I left him.

I went back to Palkavin with a report of what I had not done. I gave him an imaginary account of the precautions which Vodolski had taken, and took care to make it clear that only by stratagem could I possibly get to him. To explain this, I told the truth about my own position and the danger I was in of instant arrest should I be seen, but declared that I had friends who were to intercede for me and get me a hearing from him. I added

that I should know much more on the following night.

I had thought my story out carefully and was able to bear easily the fire of questions which he and the other two leaders who were still closeted with him directed at me.

The next day I did not leave the house. I saw Alma in the morning and told her the arrangements I had made, and I found her full of nerve for the coming attempt to escape.

She had indeed taken one very shrewd step. Under the plea of illness she had begged to be allowed to go into the garden at the back of the house in the company of the two women, and had found means to learn by what door the woman whom she was to personate would leave the house.

"We shall have very little time, Paul," she said. "The instant you leave me here, one or other of the women comes in."

"We shall only need about three minutes. Two for you to get out of the house, and one to reach the Pultowa monument, where the carriage will be waiting. You will have to leave this room alone, of course, in any case, so I shall stay on until you have had the necessary time."

"I shall need all my courage to go alone," she said.

"You have plenty of it. I am not afraid on that score," I replied as I left her. "I shan't see you again until the times comes," I added.

When the hour did come, I myself was more than a little nervous, but I found Alma cool and ready-witted. The other woman, Paula, was with her when I entered, but left the room as usual.

"There is no suspicion," said Alma. "I am sending Marie for some scent. She will be here in a minute. We have had one stroke of luck. Paula has just told me that there is some trouble somewhere in the city, and most of the men in the house have gone away in consequence."

"We shall pull through all right. The carriage will be there before this," I added, glancing at my watch. It was ten minutes past seven. "When Marie comes, I'll get up and seize her and carry her through into your bedroom. You must whip off her cloak and things, and I'll take care she doesn't raise an alarm. When you've got them on, just walk coolly downstairs and go out. I shall give you about three minutes, and then shall leave the room. They know I'm going out, and I can hurry on without causing suspicion."

We waited about a couple of minutes longer and then someone knocked at the door. Alma called to her to enter, not a tremor of excitement in her voice.

It was Marie right enough, dressed ready for the street.

I rose and strolled across the room, getting behind her while Alma held her in conversation.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A DESPERATE PLIGHT.

OUR scheme of escape came within an ace of perishing stillborn, owing to a stupid oversight on my part. Right opposite to the girl, Marie, as she stood talking to Alma, hung a large mirror, and being a somewhat pretty girl and vain, she was admiring herself in this, just as I approached her from behind.

She turned quickly and stared at me, and opened her lips to raise an alarm. A sound from her would have brought Paula rushing hotfoot to the room, and our chance would have been gone.

But I was just in time. I had a large handkerchief in my hand and before she could get out the cry, I seized her, pressed the handkerchief over her mouth, and carried her, struggling and kicking violently, into the bedroom.

"No harm will come to you if you keep quiet, but if you resist I shall silence you," I said in a low, threatening voice.

I held her while Alma deftly slipped off the things she needed for her disguise, and as quickly put them on herself. Then I fastened a towel over the girl's face, pushing part of it into her mouth as a gag, tied her arms and her legs, and thrust her into a cupboard.

By this time Alma was ready to start. She was as cool as if she had been merely starting for a walk. "I shall get through all right, Paul, but if I don't, goodbye," for she knew as well as I that it was a matter of life or death.

I kissed her. "I shall give you just three minutes' start, and shall be at the monument as soon as you. But if anything stops me, don't wait; go straight to the address I gave you, and I will follow."

I waited by the girl, listening for any sound in the house to indicate that Alma had failed. The sixty seconds seemed like an hour, the second minute like a day, and the last a century in my feverish excitement. As a last precaution, I locked the door of the bedroom and tossed the key into a corner.

Paula was waiting close at hand, and as I reached the head of the stairs to descend, she was already at the door of Alma's room. She had not suspected anything, and I ran downstairs as fast as I dared, dreading at every step to hear a cry of alarm from above.

Gortoff was in the hall. "Palkavin wants you," he said.

"I'll see him in a moment," I cried hurriedly, coining the first lie that occurred to me. "Vodolski has just driven by with my friend and is going to his house."

I threw the big door open, and at that moment came the woman's cry which I had been so dreading to hear.

"What does that mean?" he cried suspiciously.

"Run up and see, I mustn't miss Vodolski," I flung over my shoulder as I ran down the steps and darted

away in the direction of the carriage. I thanked heaven fervently when I saw that Alma was there before me, and in less than half a minute we were off.

When we had gone about a mile I stopped the driver and told him we could walk to the station.

"We shall be safer on foot for a time, but you must get rid of that tell-tale dress. Go and buy something else. I'll go into that cigar shop." I waited there until she came back, dressed like a girl of the lower middle class.

"I thought it best to choose common things to match yours," she said smiling.

We threaded our way through a number of the side streets, and after a time I hailed a droschky and we drove to within half a mile of the address which Grovski had given me.

I breathed more freely when we reached the house. He had made the necessary arrangements, and rooms were ready—for Paul Vossler and his sister—and a meal prepared.

Grovski was right in his warning. It was neither a nice house nor a safe neighbourhood. I did not like the look of the woman who admitted us, and a glimpse I got of a couple of men at the far end of the passage filled the measure of my distrust. But we were out of the grip of the Terrorists, and that was enough for the time.

While we were eating, Alma told me how she had got out of the house. "I think I managed to appear cool enough," she said, "but oh, how my heart was beating! Paula saw me leave the room, but she had not a ghost of suspicion. She just nodded and told me not to be long. M. Gortoff and

two others were in the hall, but they took no notice of me. I went right down to the bottom of the house and passed quite half a dozen of the men. But the dress took them in. It was the easiest thing in the world, and I should have been in the seventh heaven of delight, only I was thinking all the time of what would happen to you. It seemed years until I saw you running to me."

"I had a narrow squeak, too"; and I described how things had gone with me. Then we discussed our plans. My first idea was that we should pose as a couple of students, but Alma suggested it would be better to pass as workpeople. Our great difficulty was that we had no papers and there would be trouble in getting lodgings without them. "We must have our names right," I said. "I am, of course, Paul Vossler and you are my sister, but not Alma I think. What shall I christen you?"

"Shall it be your own sister's name Catherine?" she asked, laughing.

"It's such a mouthful, and Kitty is not very Russian."

"I know. Pátria. I had a dear little friend of that name. But you mustn't shorten it to Pat. That's Irish, isn't it? And as for the papers, we must do the best we can without them." She was so bravely determined to make the best of everything that her spirits infected me.

I said that I expected to get papers from Grovski, and then we set to work to invent a plausible story about ourselves. When that was done I went out to post a letter asking Grovski to come to me in the morning, and to buy myself some clothes and a revolver.

The clothes were easily obtained, but not the revolver. The strictest orders had been issued forbidding the sale of firearms, and I had to content myself with a formidable loaded stick, an ugly weapon enough if I had to use it.

It was nearly ten o'clock by then, and on my way back I saw the first signs of the coming trouble among the populace. The streets were thronged with workers, and presently they came to blows with the police. The mob swarmed up and a fight followed, in which I was nearly involved.

But I got free, and hurried back to Alma to find her considerably alarmed by another row which had occurred close to our lodging. The trouble was over, however, and soon afterwards Alma went off to bed.

As I sat alone, smoking, I realised more clearly the extreme seriousness of our plight. We had much to be thankful for, however. We had escaped the imminent danger from which the Terrorists had threatened us, but were a perilously long way from safety.

We should certainly have to wait a day or two before we could get out of the city, and if Grovski failed me in the morning and we had no papers, we couldn't get decent lodgings, and I shuddered at the thought of exposing Alma to the risks of taking her to the places where no questions would be asked.

In this gloomy mood I went to bed. For a long time I could not sleep, and when at length I did get off, I slept so soundly that I was heavy and muddle-headed when I awoke and felt under my pillow for my watch.

It was gone, and with it nearly all my money! I was wide awake enough then in a second. My distrust of the people in the house had indeed been well founded. I searched in my pockets and found that they had not been emptied, but the amount left was not much more than a score or so of roubles.

I dressed quickly, in a panic lest something should have happened to Alma, but I found her in the sitting-room waiting for me. I kept the news of the disaster from her, and tried to appear as if nothing had happened.

She was telling me how well she had slept when the woman brought in our breakfast, and I sat down to the table and forced myself to eat as if all were well.

I was at a loss what to do. To make a charge of any sort against the people of the house was out of the question. They had guessed that we were in some sort of trouble, and had taken advantage of the fact. I was almost as angry with Grovski for having sent us to such a nest of thieves as I was with the thieves themselves, and I waited for him to come in reply to my letter in the hope that he might be able to recover at least some part of what had been stolen.

He did not come, however, and I learnt afterwards he had been sent out of the city on some special duty.

At twelve o'clock the woman brought me her bill, and said bluntly that she needed the rooms at once.

Under pretence of paying her I followed and told her I had been robbed during the night. She raised Cain. Calling to a couple of men who were

waiting conveniently at hand, she told them what I had said and ordered me to leave the house at once.

Then one of the men interfered. "We'll send for the police," he said, with an ugly grin. "You can tell them. Either that, or you'll clear out of this at once."

There was nothing for it but to go. Only a fool argues with necessity. So a few minutes later saw us in the street.

Homeless, little better than penniless, without papers of identification, hunted by the police, and in danger from the Terrorists, the situation could not have been more desperate.

As we walked along the street and I was trying vainly to conceal my exceeding discomfiture, Alma asked suddenly: "Is it quite fair not to tell me the bad news as well as the good? You said nothing to me about that robbery, but I heard what those awful people were saying."

"I didn't know you heard, but I should have had to tell you soon, and it's a bit of a relief, too."

"Is it really very bad news?"

"It has its comedy side, of course, and we must make as much of that as we can. You're a rich girl with a whole heap of landed estates, and my name would be good in the usual way for a big sum, but just at the moment we have a few roubles left between us and nothing."

She laughed lightly. "We have our freedom, Paul, and as for the rest, we shall gain experience of a different sort of life."

"That's philosophy anyway. But when I spoke

last night about our being students I did not mean quite this sort of study."

"Well, I've often wondered how the poor live," she said quite cheerfully.

"I expect we shall have an idea or two about it soon," I replied. "Let us turn into the gardens here and talk things over."

"Being students we'll start with an axiom," she said as we found a seat. "No one student is to conceal anything from another student."

"I agree to that, and we'll get on to our first proposition—how to make ends meet when there's little to do it with."

"We must first ascertain definitely how much that little is, and how it can be used to make it stretch to the farthest point."

I counted up my money and found that I had twenty roubles and some loose change.

"I am richer than you," declared Alma gaily. "When I went to bed, I hid everything I had."

"Don't rub it in too hard," I said ruefully.

"I didn't mean that," she cried, laying her hand on my arm and glancing up in my face.

"It's all right. I was a fool, and the unfortunate thing is that you have to share in paying for my folly. But you'd better be careful or the people about us will take us for lovers."

"There are plenty of others to attract their attention."

"Other what?" She did not answer. "Other what, Alma?" I repeated.

"Look about you. You can see them. People, I mean, of course."

"I think you are just splendid to face things like this," I said earnestly.

"There is nothing very terrible to face yet. And if I tell you the truth, I don't think I was ever happier in my life. How could I be otherwise? Haven't we succeeded in getting out of a trouble when I had given up all hope? Is that nothing to be happy about? Suppose we haven't much money? We have each other. I haven't the remotest idea of how far a few roubles will go, and I really can't feel troubled about it. I am sure that they will buy a lot of bread, and I can live on that. We may have to rough it, and we are in a pickle, of course; but we're in it together, and must get out of it as best we can."

"That's quite a curtain lecture," I laughed.

"I think you needed it, if you believe I can't rough it and face things."

"I shan't believe it any more," and then we held a long conference as to our prospects. Alma thought of an old servant at whose house we might possibly get shelter for one or two nights, and I resolved to go to Crossley's private house and get money from him.

But we decided that we must husband our present supply very carefully, so we made the gardens our dining-room and went off to buy something to eat. I bought a loaf of bread and Alma bought some cheese, and on this frugal fare we made the first meal on a seat in the gardens.

Then we started to find the old servant. It was a long walk, but we were both good walkers, and soon grew accustomed to the strangeness of the

position. At first we were very shy of facing any police we met, but even this passed away and before we reached our destination we had both grown almost indifferent.

We met with disappointment, however. The woman we sought had left the address which Alma knew.

"We must think of somebody else, then, that's all," she said, pluckily, as we turned away, and we started for Crossley's house.

We drew another blank there. He was out of the city. He had gone to St. Petersburgh, and would not be back for two or three days.

"It looks as if we should have to walk about all night," said Alma, refusing to be downcast at the bad news. "I think I shall like it, if there is not going to be an outbreak of the people. And even if there is, I don't see that it would affect us."

"We'll get some dinner and think it over," I replied. "We must eat or we shall lose our spirits."

"I'm positively ashamed to say how hungry I am, and then, for Moscow by night," she cried, as if in the highest spirits at the prospect.

We hunted out a very modest eating-house, and as we sat waiting I picked up the evening paper. "What is it?" asked Alma, seeing me start in surprise.

"We have had an escape in all truth. That house of the Terrorists was raided by the police last night and every man in it was taken. Thank heaven, we were out of it in time. No. 'Gortoff's name is not in the list, but here are the rest. Palkavin, Manre, Pabst—these last two are the men fresh from

Antonin Gregov, you know—and the others," and I read the list of names.

Alma was drinking some water as I spoke, and as she set down the glass, I saw that she was trembling. "What's the matter?" I asked.

"Only a thought. Oh, Paul, don't you see?"

"I can see that we had a stroke of luck in getting away."

"But how was the house discovered by the police?" she asked, her eyes fixed on mine with a look of intense concern.

"It doesn't say, but—by Jove, I see what you mean! The Terrorists will think I have betrayed them!" I exclaimed, as the meaning of her troubled looks flashed upon me. It was this new danger to me which had startled her, and I think I was even more alarmed than she had been.

Anyhow, she was the first to rally. "Well, we can't expect to have the luck every day," she said cheeringly, and with a brave smile.

"That's true; and it would have been fifty thousand times worse if the police had found us there," I replied, following her lead in making the best of it.

The waiter brought us our dinner then. "I shan't let it spoil my appetite, and you mustn't," she declared, in the same light tone.

"Rather not." But I found it difficult. It was about as bad a stroke as Fortune could have dealt us. I knew that my name would be given to the new Terrorist leaders as the traitor, and every one of them would be eager to put a bullet in my head or thrust a dagger into my heart.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A VOICE IN THE CROWD.

WE had had so many hard knocks from Fortune that the effect of this last one did not last very long. Alma was very brave and determined to see only the best side of the affair.

"There's one thing certain, Paul; if all the men who know you are arrested, the chance of your being recognised is much less than it was."

"Good. I hadn't thought of that," I answered, with a smile.

"I wonder what the Terrorists will do now their leaders are arrested."

"They won't take it lying down. I expect there'll be trouble to-night, and the streets won't be safe. I'm afraid we must risk a hotel of some sort."

"But our money. We can't afford it."

"We can't afford to be without a shelter of some sort to-night, I am sure."

When the waiter came with the bill I asked him to tell us where we could get beds. He told us we could remain there, and said that we had better secure the rooms at once, as they were likely to be all taken later on; so I followed him and registered

as " Paul Vossler, chauffeur," and " Patria Vossler, sister of same, seamstress," with other details equally fictitious ; and, as was the custom in the house when the guests had no baggage, I paid for the two rooms in advance.

Soon afterwards we went out. I was anxious to see for myself the condition of things ; and we soon had sufficient evidence to show me that I had done the right thing in making sure of a shelter for the night.

The streets were quite unsafe. They were thronged with workers in a very excited and turbulent mood. Groups and meetings were everywhere being addressed in fiery passionate tones by speakers of all classes, and everywhere the note was the same—that the hour had arrived for resistance.

We paused once or twice to listen, and a few syllables showed that what had roused the temper of the populace was the sweeping arrests of the leaders. The name of Antonin Gregov was on every tongue, and every reference to him was a signal for a burst of cheers, while the names of Palkavin and his colleagues were hailed as the latest martyrs in the cause of the people and of freedom.

The police were out in strong force also, making many arrests ; and more than once came into collision with the crowd. Tempers on both sides were at white heat, and we saw enough brutality displayed by both to sicken us. To be in the streets at all was treated as an offence, and to listen to the speeches as a crime ; and we saw numbers of both men and women, innocent of the slightest wrong-doing, seized, buffeted, ill-treated, and hurried off to gaol.

Seeing that it might be our turn at any moment, we hastened back to the place where we were to sleep, choosing the quietest streets for safety.

Alma and I had talked over the new characters we were to assume, and had settled upon the story we were to give should the need arise; but I hoped that, as the city was in such an uproar, the police would have too much to do to trouble about the inmates of such a remote house as ours.

I was wrong, however. We were waiting for the keys of our rooms and, to keep up the fiction of my being a mechanician in search of work, I was asking the landlord where I should be likely to find some, when the front doors were thrust violently open and the police entered.

The first words they uttered gave me a chill of alarm. The visit was the result of the raid on the Terrorist centre; and they were searching for Gortoff and any suspicious characters who might have chosen that place for shelter.

"What strangers have you in the house?" the landlord was asked.

"Here is the register. This couple here, and half a dozen men in their rooms upstairs," was the reply.

The official read the entries in the register and shot such a sharp, suspicious glance at us, that I wished with all my heart and soul we had risked the dangers of the streets, instead of having put our heads in the lion's mouth in this way.

Before questioning me the official turned back and whispered to the landlord. The latter glanced at us and shrugged his shoulders. Then he ran his finger down the list of names on the register, pausing

once or twice to whisper a word or two, apparently about the different entries.

I gathered from this that he was on good terms with the police, and, as was commonly the case, was in the habit of giving a hint if any suspicious character sought the hospitality of the house.

The police agent called his men, gave them the numbers of certain rooms and sent them upstairs, and then turned to me. I was thankful for the delay, as it had enabled me to recover from the first shock of the surprise and to pull myself together for the coming trial of wits.

"Now, Paul Vossler!"

"Here, sir," I replied, sharply, as if answering a roll call.

"Your papers?"

"I have none, sir. I lost them on the journey here from Berlin."

"How?"

"We left the train at Vilna to get something to eat, and I must have dropped my pocket-book. All my money is gone, too, except this"; and I took out our remaining few roubles and showed them to him. "We are in a hole, sir." It was a lame yarn enough, but a bad tale told well is better than a good one told badly. And I could see that I had told mine well.

"What were you doing in Berlin?"

"Chauffeur to his Excellency Baron von Taubmann."

"What are you doing in Moscow?"

"We only arrived this afternoon. I came to look for employment as a chauffeur or any kind of motor work I can get."

"You can't get employment without papers."

"I have telegraphed to his Excellency. I am sure he will write to the authorities and speak for me, sir, if I don't get my pocket-book back."

"How much did the telegram cost you?"

I was well up in the telegraph tariff, and gave him the number of words and the cost. He couldn't stump me there.

My prompt reply produced an excellent effect, and I actually began to hope that he believed me.

"You speak German, I suppose?" he asked next, in that language.

"Certainly," I replied, and gave him proof of it, in the form of a fluent expression of my regret at my misfortune.

"Any other language?" he asked, in English.

"English, a leetle," I said, with a smile. "The Baron had Eenglish valet." I was glad to see him smile at my accent.

A number of other questions followed, and all my replies appeared to satisfy him.

"This your sister?" he asked at length.

"My sister, Patria, sir."

He questioned Alma then, and she followed my lead and gave him a full account of her work as a seamstress in Berlin, managing very cleverly to work in a lot of German technical terms which he did not understand. But they added to the favourable impression of our sincerity. Her coolness and resource were magnificent.

"Why did you choose Moscow? Have you any friends here?" he asked me.

"Alas! no, sir. We wished to be in our own

country. The Baron said Moscow was better than Petersburgh, although the landlord there does not think so. But I am not afraid if I can get a chance."

"You know all about motors, then?"

"I think so," I replied, with a confident smile.

"Where do you mean to stay in Moscow?"

"Here, while my little store of money lasts; after that——" I finished with a shrug of doubt and a smiling gesture.

"When you get your letter from your late master you may be able to find employment with the police."

"Thank you, sir."

"Report yourself to-morrow at the police headquarters."

"Yes, sir," I replied, with a feeling of intense thankfulness that the ordeal was over, but even then there came a last twist of the screw.

He was turning away when he caught sight of my parcel. "By the way, what's in your parcel there?"

My heart sank at the question. It was, of course, the crude disguise I had worn at the Terrorist centre. If he saw it was a Russian garb, all sorts of suspicions would be aroused. But I managed to keep my head.

"Only my work clothes, sir," I replied lightly. I picked up the parcel that he might see that it was limp and contained clothes, and began to fumble with the knot. "Will you lend me a knife, landlord?" I asked.

He called to the waiter to bring one, and only these seconds of delay saved us from discovery. Just as the waiter brought me the knife the other lodgers were brought into the room by the police. The agent bent forward and felt the parcel to satisfy

himself that there was nothing but clothes in it. "Never mind," he said to me, and turned away to interrogate the other men.

Alma and I went upstairs then, and a woman went with us to show us our rooms.

"I hope that telegram will be here in the morning, Paul," she said.

"So do I. We'll go first thing to the bureau."

"Good-night, dear. I'm dreadfully tired after the journey"; and she went into her room without another word and without showing a trace of her feelings.

In that prosaic way the first day of our wanderings ended, and I threw myself into bed, profoundly thankful that we were safe so far.

I was up early and called Alma. We must be out of the house without delay, lest the police agent should send round for "Paul Vossler, chauffeur." Lulling the landlord's suspicions by saying that we should remain for some days in the house, I added that I would go round at once to see if a telegram had come from "His Excellency," and asked Alma in a casual tone if she cared for the stroll before breakfast.

She understood and agreed after a slight demur, and a minute or two later we were hurrying to the other side of the city. When we were at a safe distance we breakfasted on bread washed down with milk, and then made for the gardens where we had "dined" on the previous day.

"I hope you won't get the disease in earnest," said Alma once, as we sat discussing our prospects. "It would be fatal to our happiness."

"Disease?"

She laughed merrily. Nothing seemed to daunt her spirits. "You rolled them off so glibly last night to that man that I could scarcely believe you had not had years of practice. I almost believed you myself."

"It was a very thin yarn, yet it satisfied him, thank heaven. But it was touch and go when he wanted to look in that parcel."

"I don't think my heart ever beat so hard in my life. I had given up hope. I knew that if he saw you had a Russian costume he would suspect the whole story."

"The marvel is he didn't suspect it long before."

"You wouldn't marvel if you could have heard and seen yourself."

"But you were quite as natural as I was. How did you know all those German technical terms?"

"I've been in Berlin several times, and I had a maid once who had been a worker in a factory there."

"If it comes to that, I shall have to be as much on my guard about you as you about me. Anyhow, there's one consolation. If we could get out of such a tight place as that last night, we can face almost anything."

It was a blessing that we were both able to talk in this light vein, for our plight was certainly worse than on the previous day. But Alma was resolved to see none but the brightest side of everything; and that day tested her pluck severely.

We spent the hours wandering about the outskirts of the city, and again that night were driven to seek some shelter, ill as we could afford the money. The unrest everywhere was growing apace. Fight-

ing between the police and the people was frequent and much more serious, and I heard that night that a general strike had been ordered to take place on the morrow.

That must be Antonin Gregov's doing, I knew. Every hour was now bringing us closer to the declaration by him on which so much depended for us.

We found a shelter that night in the outskirts; and if we had only had sufficient money I would not have ventured into the city at all for the whole of that next day. We had barely a rouble left, however, and some place had to be found where I could sell some of Alma's jewellery.

We started on the errand together; but when I saw the condition of things I urged Alma to return to where we had slept and let me go on alone.

She would not hear of it. "I cannot stay alone. I cannot," she declared. "All we have in the world at present is just one another. Don't beggar me utterly."

I gave up then, and we went on together. The whole city appeared to be in revolt. Bands of men, hundreds and even thousands strong, were marching through the streets, and the police were utterly unable to cope with the numbers. The blood of the populace had fired, and they were set on exacting a grim and violent penalty from those whom they regarded as their enemies.

Looting had not yet begun, however; and many of the shopkeepers still had their premises open. I succeeded in finding a place where I sold a couple of Alma's rings, and as soon as I had done this I

turned to retrace our steps and get out of the melée as soon as possible.

In crossing one of the main streets, however, we were caught in the throng of people, and had to wait while one of the huge processions passed.

At the head of it was a man whose appearance struck me instantly. Of middle age, in the dress of a well-to-do citizen, his air was unmistakably that of a born leader of men. His hard-lined face was stern and set, his eyes alight with the fire of enthusiasm, his austere features eloquent of power and force, and his whole bearing dignified, resolute, and forceful. In every sense, a remarkable man.

Everywhere loud cheers rent the air in his honour, and I jumped at once to the conclusion that he was the man of whom I had heard so much.

"Is that Antonin Gregov?" I asked a man next to me.

"Off with your hat to him if you are one of us," was the reply; and he himself shouted and cheered as if to split his lungs.

It is a good rule to shout with the loudest, so I shouted, and Alma, not to be behind, waved her hand.

As we turned to resume our walk, the crowd having thinned, someone brushed against me and a voice whispered close to my ear: "Mr. Enderby!"

Alma heard it, too, and I felt her grip on my arm tighten convulsively.

My heart seemed to leap into my throat, but I dared not give a sign of response, dared not even look round; and I went on talking as though I had not heard.

CHAPTER XXV.

IN THE TERRORIST NET AGAIN.

In the condition of tension produced by the utterance of my name in the crowd, we walked some distance, waiting to hear it repeated and fearing a thousand troubles, arrest among them.

But no repetition came, no detaining hand was laid on my shoulder; and taking courage at length, I stopped and, under pretence of pointing out some object to Alma, I looked stealthily about me. There was no one at my side, however, and so far as a hasty glance would enable me to notice, no one was paying any special attention to us.

It was a mystery. "You heard it, didn't you?" I asked Alma.

She nodded. "What can it mean? My heart came up into my mouth."

"Someone thought he had recognised me. We'll hurry on."

This was easier to say than to do; and almost directly afterwards we were stopped again by another procession of the strikers. This time we stood at a street corner. The pressure of the crowd forced us back against a shop front; and as the people thronged about us, my name was repeated by the same voice.

I was on my guard now. I whipped off my cap and turned to cheer with the multitude, while I glanced round at the people close to me. I did not recognise anyone.

I was setting my cap on my head again when the same voice said: "Mr. Enderby, it's Buloff."

I recognised him then. It was Eikov, cleverly disguised as a ragamuffin striker. For a moment I hesitated whether to deny myself even to him.

"I waited for you to shout again, sir. I knew your voice."

"Are you a friend or what?"

"Need you ask that, sir? I hope you don't distrust me. A single hint to any of these people, and you would be torn to pieces."

"I beg your pardon for the thought. I'm in a bad way."

"So am I, sir. Someone told the police about me, and I've been hunted like a rat for two days."

"This is Mademoiselle Kasslov. We have also been hunted, and are going a little way out of the city."

"You'll pardon me, but you should both be better disguised. I can get you disguises if you will trust me; and I think you'll be safer in the city than the outskirts."

"We are worse off than you. We have both sides to fear."

"They'll both soon be too busy fighting each other to think of anything else, sir. The workers have left the factories almost to a man, and are getting their arms to-day. The streets will soon be running with blood."

"Is it true that I am suspected of having betrayed the leaders?"

"Yes, sir. They are all mad about you. The news came from the prison yesterday. They say no one but you could have given the information; and that you told Grovski, the police agent."

I told him what had happened to Alma and myself since our flight, and our ceaseless fear lest the police should recognise us.

"I'll help you all I can, if you will let me. I can get you clothes so that you will look more like workers. The lady's hair should be changed, and you should both be dirtier in hands and face. Will you come with me?"

I agreed without hesitation. If he had meant mischief, he was right in saying that a single cry to those about us would have meant our destruction. I believed I could safely trust him.

He led us through a number of by-streets and stopped at the door of a dingy-looking, dirty house. He had the key of this, and took us into a back room. "You will be quite safe here for a time, sir," he said confidently. "I'll get what you want for the disguises."

Eikov was not long away, and when he returned he brought clothes and two bottles of hair-dye and a very cleverly-fashioned red beard. With his assistance—and he was a master in the art—an hour's work so changed Alma that I am sure I should have passed her in the street; and when she saw my red hair and I had adjusted the red beard and soiled my hands and face, she said much the same of me.

Then I asked him if he could help me to get some money, but he declared it was impossible. My office was watched day and night, and the houses of every one connected with it. "You must have had a very narrow escape in going to Mr. Crossley," he declared, when I told him of the visit there.

There was nothing for it, therefore, but to remain in the city and brave things out as best we could; and he undertook to get us such papers of identification as would enable us to satisfy any casual police inquiries.

The question came next as to where we could stay; and on this point he gave us some very unpleasant news. While he was out he had heard that, although the police were shirking the encounter with the mob and the brunt of the fighting was to be left to the soldiery, they were active in making searches in the districts where the workers lived.

"The streets will be the safest place while this house-to-house searching is going on," he said. "But I daresay you know the usual method of the strikers. We get the alarm in time; we have spies at every street corner; and the moment the alarm is given we rush off and only return when the police have found no one to arrest."

"We can stay here for the present, then?"

"Oh! yes, sir. But we had better not be seen together outside. There's always much more risk for three than even two; but, of course, it is best for each man and woman to be alone. If this street is searched to-day, I will be at the corner to-night between nine and ten on the look-out for you. I'm afraid I can do no more than that."

"I shan't forget what you've done already; and if we pull through, you'll have no cause to regret it."

"No, indeed," cried Alma, holding out her hand impulsively.

"I have done very little, Excellency," he replied, as he took her hand very nervously.

Just at that moment someone knocked at the door of the house. A double knock, then after a pause a single knock, and after a further pause, another double knock.

"We must go," cried Eikov instantly, springing to his feet. "It is the police."

Helter-skelter we rushed out of the house and joined a lot of other people who were leaving the houses as fast as they could. I turned to rush up the street, but Eikov called me. "Not that way, Vossler. The police have both ends of the street stopped. Through here"; and he led us through a house half-way up the street and out across a yard at the back, through another house opening into the next street, and again through yet a third and fourth house into the thoroughfare beyond.

A man was posted there, and told us that all was clear; and we walked up this quickly and reached the main street at the end, where Eikov left us. "Between nine and ten to-night," he said as we parted. "It won't be safe till then; and if there's any trouble, I'll have some other place ready."

The meeting with Eikov and his promise to find us shelter, put us both in better heart; while the improved disguises which he had provided added greatly to our sense of security. We avoided the thoroughfares where there was likely to be any fighting, and

passed a day of less anxiety than any since our troubles had begun.

As a matter of fact, there was little or no violence during the hours of daylight. The strikers were practically left in possession of the streets, and for the most part they were contented to march about and hold meetings. I judged that Baron Vodolski was resolved to force the mob to take the initiative in the work of violence, and that he was holding both police and soldiery in reserve.

When the time came for us to meet Eikov, we were the first at the appointed place; and while we were waiting, a significant incident occurred. The leaders of the strikers, understanding the tactics of the authorities, had cautioned their followers against violence, but the hangers-on of the mob, the roughs and toughs and dregs of the city, were in a very different mood. They were eager for loot. Several houses and stores had been broken open and amongst them was one close to where we were waiting.

The police were not present, but a body of strikers gathered round, and one of their speakers rushed at once to the spot and attacked the thieves. A stiff fight followed, but I noticed that the strikers were not yet armed, fists and feet and sticks and a knife or two were the only weapons used.

Some heads were cracked, and some men on both sides rather badly kicked and mauled, but no serious injuries appeared to be inflicted during the few minutes the affair lasted.

But most disastrously for us, two or three women were among those hurt, and one of these, bleeding badly from a wound on the face, staggered in

our direction and fell to the ground almost at our feet.

Alma stooped to help her, and as she did so a brute of a fellow rushed up and tried to kick the fallen woman. I stopped him and shoved him back against the wall. He glared at me like a beast robbed of his prey and felt for his knife. But not finding it, and apparently not caring to tackle me, he ran to vent his rage on Alma.

"Mind, Alma!" I cried, forgetting all caution in my alarm, and calling her by name.

She succeeded in avoiding his rush, and as he came close to me I gave him an upper cut which sent him down into the gutter.

Some other men interfered then, but they were workers, and were as indignant as I at the fellow's conduct.

And then, just as I thought the thing was over and we were well out of it, a hand was laid on my shoulder.

I turned angrily to resent this, and found myself face to face with Gortoff.

"You can't escape. There are too many of us here," he said, in a low tone, indicating a group of stern-faced men who stood about him. "Don't force me to speak your name aloud."

Resistance was out of the question.

At that moment Eikov arrived. He saw the position at a glance; and I hoped for a moment that he would take Alma away. But instead he ran off down the street; and Alma, having seen the women carried away, came to me.

We were thus both once more fast in the perilous Terrorist net.

It was a shabby trick indeed which Fortune had played us. We had only been discovered by the extraordinary chance that the one man in all the thousands of people in Moscow who could recognise me was present when I had called Alma by her name.

Alma had no suspicion of the disaster when she came up to me, but my looks told her that something was very much amiss; and then she recognised Gortoff.

"M. Gortoff has seen through my disguise," I told her. "What do you mean to do?" I asked him.

"You see that resistance is useless?"

"Quite. I shall not attempt any. Our lives are in your hands."

"I have no alternative." He spoke to one or two of the men round him, and then turned to me. "You will come with me," he said curtly.

The matter was not the less disquieting for being thus quietly carried out. It was the harder to bear calmly, however, because the blow had fallen when we both were feeling more hopeful than for some days past.

Alma was very brave. I know that she recognised to the full the peril into which we had thus suddenly fallen; but would give no sign of distress or despair lest it should distress me.

We walked some little distance, Gortoff indicating the turnings we were to take. If I had been alone, I would have chanced an attempt to escape while in the streets. But Alma's presence made that impossible. A sudden coup might have enabled me to get off, but I could not have got her away. If anything was to be done, I should have to do it after we reached our destination, wherever that might be.

It proved to be a house in a quiet street, and while we were waiting to be admitted I had a good look at the surroundings. They were not promising, and when we were taken upstairs to a barely-furnished room, the one window of which looked out upon a flagged yard some twenty or more feet below, the chances appeared infinitely remote.

Gortoff came into the room alone with us. "I am deeply sorry to have to do this, but I am bound by my oath," he said. "You may not think much of an oath, for you broke yours and betrayed us all."

"I am not going to whine, Gortoff, but that is not true. I had no hand in giving any information. The oath was forced on me, you know that, and all I did was to procure the escape of Mademoiselle Kasslov." As I spoke I ran my eyes over him to see if I could detect the bulge of a weapon.

He intercepted the glance and read it correctly.

"You cannot hope to escape again," he said quickly, "and will be foolhardy to try."

I shrugged my shoulders. "What are you going to do?" I asked.

"I shall inform the new leaders that you are here. It is for them to decide."

"It is a fortunate thing for me that I ever had you for a friend."

The sneer cut him. "I did not cause you to play the traitor."

"You dragged me into it. You needn't lie."

"I do not lie!" he cried hotly, incautiously approaching a step or two nearer in his anger. I began to see my chance coming.

"Have you the infernal insolence to deny that you

brought me into all this? You saved my life, it is true, but I suppose you had this in mind at the time." It was a low-down, dirty sneer, but it had the effect I wished.

He lost the rest of his temper and raised his clenched fist.

"You are a coward to say that. Nothing but a coward," he exclaimed furiously.

I caught hold of his hand, as if I thought he was about to strike me, and at the same moment plunged my hand into his pocket and took his revolver. "I had a purpose. This was it," I replied, coolly, as I stepped between him and the door. "I take that statement back. I didn't mean it, except to provoke you enough to put you off your guard. But I mean this, mind you. While we stay here, you stay with us."

For the moment he was a picture of disconcertment, but he soon recovered his calmness. "It will not help you," he said. "Nothing can do that."

"That remains to be seen."

"Do you mean you would shoot me?"

"As sure as you are a living man this moment, I do. You brought us here knowing that it meant our lives; now it means yours as well. You have warned me that there is no escape; you can take that warning to yourself."

He paused a moment, frowning, and then looked me full in the eyes for as long as a man might have taken to count a dozen. "I was looking to see if you could do murder in cold blood. I don't believe it. I shall test you. I am going to leave the room."

"Don't you move a step," I muttered, between my teeth.

"Paul!" cried Alma appealingly, breaking her long silence.

"This is for me to settle," I said, without looking at her.

"No, no, Paul; not before me," she cried, in great agitation.

I let this go unheeded, and as I stared into Gortoff's eyes I saw a flinch of hesitation in them. It needs cold steel courage to walk up to an armed man in as desperate corner as I was then, and Gortoff lacked it.

"It can only end in one way," he muttered, after a second's pause.

"You are right," I said meaningly. "We'll let it go at that."

He was ashamed of his lack of courage, and yet unwilling to face the death which threatened him if he had misjudged me. The strain tried him terribly, and he sat down leaning his head on his hand.

Alma came across and urged me not to carry out my threat; and her conviction of my earnestness added to his fear. "Leave this to me," I answered, with a touch of sternness for his benefit, my eyes never off his face.

"I would not have believed it of you," she murmured, wringing her hands as she went back to the window.

A silence followed, lasting minutes, broken at length by the entrance of one of the men who had brought us to the house.

"Shall you be long? Need we wait?" he asked.

The crisis had come, and I held my breath as Gortoff rose.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE WORST.

GORTOFF'S agitation was intense. The man who came in was behind me, and I held the revolver so that he should not see it and took a couple of paces nearer to Gortoff.

He could not force himself to speak the words which he felt would bring death to him. "Wait a while," he said hoarsely; and after a glance of surprise and perplexity, the man went out.

Gortoff fell back on his chair again, and I breathed a sigh of relief. I thought we had won; but after another long silence he rose, his face ashen, his lips trembling, and his voice all unsteady.

"I have been trying to persuade myself to be false to my oath, but I cannot. You must kill me, if you will"; and he came toward me.

At this Alma took alarm and threw herself in front of him, facing me.

"You shall not, Paul. You shall not stain your hands with his blood, even to save me."

"Stand away, Alma," I said sternly. "This is between him and me. This means my life and liberty. You forget, Gortoff, that only you can

recognise me. I shall say we quarrelled, and that I shot you in self-defence. If, after what she has done to protect you, you raise an alarm, I'll shoot you, on my oath."

Alma was deceived by my words, and, clasping her hands to her face, went back to her seat with a low, shuddering cry of horror.

For the third time there was silence, while his fright-tied wits sought to find a way out of the tangle. "I won't break my oath," he said at last.

"Then the rest shall hear we are quarrelling"; and I raised my voice and began to abuse him, pausing now and again, as if for him to reply.

In one of the pauses we heard the same knock at the house door which had warned us of the arrival of the police when we were with Eikov.

"The police are coming!" cried Gortoff. "That is our signal."

"Let them come. They can't be less merciless than you."

Sounds of movement and confusion were heard in the house below. Then someone dashed up the stairs and knocked. Finding the door fast, he called loudly to Gortoff by name that the police were coming.

"We are settling a private quarrel. Leave us to settle it as we will!" I cried. He made a vigorous effort to force the door, and failing, clattered away downstairs.

I waited a few seconds and then went out on the landing. The house was already deserted.

"You can go, Gortoff," I called to him.

He came hurrying out; and as Alma joined me on

the landing we heard him fly down and out of the house with all the speed of panic.

"What shall we do, Paul?" she asked breathlessly.

"We can't fly with them. After what has passed here he would denounce us to the rest, and our plight would be worse than even in the hands of the police."

"But if they take you ——" and she threw up her hands in distress.

"We'll go down and see if we can get away. But if they take us they may not recognise us in this disguise; and I've had enough of the Terrorists."

We went down to a room on the ground floor which looked out on the street, and we saw there a repetition of the scene we had witnessed before in our flight from Eikov's. The people were flying panic-stricken from the police.

"It is useless to fly," I said. "We could only get away by some such secret means as Eikov showed us before; and if we found it we should be in the hands of these men again."

"I would rather wait," she said deliberately; and we sat down together to await arrest.

Her courage was undaunted; and even when a loud knock sounded on the door, announcing the arrival of the search party, she was absolutely unmoved.

"We had better admit them at once," she said, very calmly.

I rose with a heavy heart and went to the front door to admit the police, and then had the pleasantest surprise of my life.

"Thank heaven you are safe, sir. And the mademoiselle? Come with me at once."

It was Eikov; and hearing his voice Alma came out of the little room.

In the rush of relief I could not speak.

"What does it mean, Eikov?" asked Alma.

"Come with me at once or it may be too late."

"Where are you taking us?" I asked, as I found that he was heading straight for the end of the street. "The police will be there."

"There are no police, sir; and if the trick I have played is discovered it will cost me my life. I saw what had happened when Gortoff discovered you both. I managed to follow you, guessing where you would be brought; and after waiting until it was safe, I raised a false alarm. I would have done it at once, only the outposts would have seen; but there was trouble, and they went off to take a hand in it. I knew they would bolt; but I hope to heaven they will never know what I did."

"And to think that I ever doubted this man," whispered Alma to me, as we were hurrying along at top speed.

He had proved himself a friend indeed, but there were limits even to the help he could render us. "Can you find us a shelter for the night somewhere?" I asked him when we had put a safe distance between the house and ourselves.

"I have been trying to think of some place; but in the last hour or two the whole situation has changed. The strikers have done nothing, as they were waiting for the arms which were to have been served out to-night. But some roughs made a

feeble attempt on one of the banks, and in a moment the troops, which had been secretly posted in reserve, were poured into every part of the city and the police have started raiding in all directions. Someone also betrayed the secret of the storage of arms, and every place is in the hands of the military. The whole movement has been killed at a stroke, and none of the old haunts will be safe."

Baron Vodolski had certainly laid his plans with consummate shrewdness, and his spies among the Terrorists had served him well. Then it flashed upon me that as I had also been told of the whereabouts of these secret stores of arms, their discovery would be regarded as further treachery on my part.

I decided to get away to the outskirts of the city, and to make for a place where we had passed the previous night. But this was as full of hazard as of difficulty. We soon had evidence of the activity of both police and soldiery. Thousands of troops were out, hunting down the populace who were flying like flocks of sheep before wolves.

We had no option but to turn and fly with them, hiding where and how we could ; and in one of these rushes we were parted from Eikov. A dozen times in half an hour we escaped capture or injury only by a hair's breadth, for the troops were using their bayonets freely as well as their heavily-knotted, cruel whips. We crouched in doorways, fled into cellars, or darted up the alleys into back sheds, just as opportunity offered, sobbing women, crying children, and panic-stricken men our companions. We should have been hunted out of these and caught the very first time had it not been that there were

so many left in the open streets that our pursuers had no time to follow individuals.

There must have been thousands of prisoners taken, for the strategy of those directing the movements of the police and troops was entirely successful.

In the main thoroughfares the strikers were caught in bulk; tens and even hundreds being driven off as prisoners between strong bodies of the troops. The by-streets were no safer. Small bodies of police were on the watch incessantly, and every-one found abroad was seized indiscriminately and hurried off to temporary lock-ups.

We had to abandon all hope of reaching the out-skirts of the city; and at last found shelter in an unfinished building. For two or three hours we remained there, haunted by the constant dread of discovery, and dismayed by the harrying fear that when daylight dawned the risk would be a hundred times greater.

As the night wore on, however, there came a lull in the turmoil, the shouts of the soldiery were fewer, the harrowing cries of the injured less frequent, and the sounds of the unequal conflict began to die down.

"I think we must venture to go," I said to Alma. "I am afraid of what the daylight may have for us if we remain here."

"I am ready. If we stay we are sure to be caught, and there is just a chance we may get through now," she replied, as pluckily as ever.

We stole out, and, finding our street empty, started, choosing the by-ways and back streets, and keeping close under the shadow of the houses.

We went in single file. I was in front, keeping a

sharp look-out, and Alma close behind me. Most of the grim work had evidently been accomplished, for the first dozen streets through which we slunk in this stealthy manner were entirely deserted. The first people we met were a party of three men and a couple of women, fugitives like ourselves. I stopped one of the men and asked him if there were many police ahead of us.

"They are everywhere!" he cried excitedly.

"Can we get through?"

"God knows!" he cried, as he shook off my grasp and hurried after the others.

We had another difficulty now to contend with. I did not know where we were. I had a general idea of the direction in which we ought to go, but our many zig-zag flights had brought us into a neighbourhood which was entirely strange to me.

There was nothing for it but to push on and trust to luck until I reached some part that I knew. When I came to a cross street I peered round the corner of a house cautiously to make sure that it was clear, and presently I saw some half-dozen men coming towards us. We hid directly, squeezing ourselves flat against the wall under cover of a doorway.

They stood a moment or two looking along our street, but did not see us, and resumed their way. I waited until their footsteps had died away, and then we made a dart across the road.

As ill-fortune would have it, one of the men chanced to turn round just as we crossed. A shout told us that we were seen, and we set off running like hares, turning every corner we came to in the effort to shake off the pursuit.

We were getting away all right when to our dismay we heard the noise of fighting some little distance ahead. Then another small body of police saw us running, and came dashing after us. We had no choice except to rush on, and as we ran out into a wider thoroughfare, we dashed right into the midst of a crowd of strikers who were flying helter-skelter before a body of troops and police.

We turned and fled with them. It was the only chance left to us, and a desperate one enough.

We tried to extricate ourselves from the throng and get away by a side turning, but it was impracticable ; the pressure of the mob was too great.

Suddenly the mad flight came to an abrupt halt. A hoarse shout went up from the crowd, and I saw that we had been joined by another mob of strikers, and the united force were re-forming to make a fight of it.

I succeeded in drawing Alma to one side into the partial cover of a doorway ; and from that point we witnessed the conflict. It was very short. The mob were only armed with clubs and iron bars, but they outnumbered their opponents by ten to one, and they were fighting for their lives.

Men fell all around us, shot and bayoneted, and struck down by clubbed weapons, but others were ready to take their places ; and for once that night force of numbers prevailed over arms and discipline. It was like hell let loose while the fight lasted, and Alma turned sick and faint with the horror of it.

When the mob triumphed and their foes were put to flight the pressure of the crowd about us lessened

and we endeavoured to resume our flight. But then a new danger threatened us.

"You were not fighting, friend," said one of a group of men who was wiping the blood and sweat from his hands and face.

"I had no arms," I replied.

"What are those?" he demanded fiercely, pointing to some clubs and bars which had dropped from the hands of the wounded and dead, and lay in the roadway. "You are spies!"

He roared out the words, and a number of others, hearing it, came crowding round and began to hoot and hiss at us.

"We are no spies. We are flying for our lives."

"Why didn't you fight for them, then?"

"What's all this about spies? Where are they?" asked a newcomer, pushing his way through the throng; for the news had spread like a dry gunpowder train.

With a sickening feeling of dismay, I recognised Scharkoff. I held my tongue, in the hope that he would not know me in my disguise. He did not. He appeared to be in some sort of authority, for the rest cleared a little space between him and us. He peered into my face and then plucked the cap from my head. Then he stared at Alma, while the man who had first stopped us told him that I stood aloof from the fighting.

"What's your name?" he demanded, with an oath.

Instead of answering him, I tore my cap out of his hand and made as if to strike him. He drew back a pace, and those about us roared at the top of their voices:

"Spies! Spies! They are both spies! Down with them!"

Alma shrank back, and I stood in front of her, fearing an instant attack. But it did not come for the moment; the shouts died down into confused murmuring, and then came the sound of firing down the street.

"Say who you are or I'll brain you!" cried Scharkoff with an oath, threatening me with a heavy crowbar he was carrying.

The firing was repeated; nearer this time.

"The soldiers are coming back," yelled a voice in the crowd.

I saw a desperate chance. "Give me a weapon, and I'll show you whether I'll fight with you or not," I shouted.

But at the sound of my voice Scharkoff recognised me. I saw his eyes gleam with malice and hate. A deep oath rolled from his tongue. "It's you is it?" he growled. Then he turned to the rest. "I know this man. He is——"

His voice was drowned in the roll of firearms, followed by an answering yell of fury from hundreds of voices as the soldiers were seen now close at hand.

"The soldiers! The soldiers! Give it to them again!"

I kept my eyes on Scharkoff.

He glanced round once at the incoming troops and the fighting which had again broken out.

"There's time to finish you, you traitor!" he growled with an oath and, swinging his crowbar, rushed to dash out my brains.

My life and Alma's too were at stake, and I

whipped out the revolver I had taken from Gortoff and shot him in the arm. His weapon dropped harmlessly with a clang on the stones at my feet. He made a grab at it with his left hand, but I kicked it away.

Infuriated by his failure, he tried next to seize me and to yell out my name at the top of his raucous, powerful voice. But that would have spelt death as surely as his blow; for although the mob was now in flight, there were many of them who would have given their lives to have taken mine.

I dashed my fist in his face and stopped him before he had got out his first syllable. But he had no lack of pluck. He turned to another man near him and was about to repeat it when I fired again and he fell.

Those who saw it were mad with rage, but I held them in check a moment with my revolver, and next they were swept away by the crowd now in full flight. We crouched in the doorway while the mob swept past us, hotly pursued by the troops and police who had come up in overwhelming force.

The defeat of the mob was now certain, but the worst of our plight was that the victory of the troops was just as full of hazard as their defeat would have been.

CHAPTER XXVII.

DESPAIR.

My first act when I saw that the mob had been beaten was to toss away the revolver which had stood us in such good stead. If I were caught in the possession of such a weapon, it would be at once accepted as proof that we were Terrorists and had been guilty of armed resistance.

Our one hope now was that, when we were arrested, we might not be recognised among the multitude of prisoners that had been taken, and merely detained with them for a day or so until the city had settled down, and then set at liberty.

Escape was, of course, out of the question. To have attempted it would only have been to run the risk of being shot. The troops were mad with rage as the result of the previous fight in which they had been worsted. They were firing at random into the ranks of the mob, and lashing and clubbing all they caught with a fearsome brutality.

Nothing but sheer good luck enabled us to avoid the worst of all this. The door against which we stood was opened from within, and we rushed into the passage and urged the man to whom it belonged

to allow us to shelter there. He would not hear of it, of course, but the altercation lasted long enough for the troops to have passed before we were arrested, and thus we were fortunately taken by the police instead of the soldiery.

Alma behaved magnificently at that crisis. With great dignity and coolness she asserted our innocence, and her bearing and speech had a great effect upon our captors. Perceiving that she was of a very different class from the rest of the prisoners, and believing that they had succeeded in capturing a person of importance, they kept us in the house until the streets were clear, and then took us away, showing far more consideration than I had hoped for.

But we had to pay a price for being saved from ill-treatment—the probability of being recognised at the police quarters. We were separated, of course. Alma, as she told me afterwards, was placed in a cell alone, while I was put into a room with some thirty or forty of the unfortunate strikers. Many of them had been badly injured either in some one of the numerous street fights, or by their captors; and all of them bore traces of that dark night's work.

I will not dwell on the horrors of the hours that followed my arrest. Consumed with racking anxiety on Alma's account, nauseated with the fetid atmosphere which reeked with the abominations inevitable where forty dirty human beings were crowded into a space which would have been fouled by ten clean ones; harrowed by the sights of suffering among the wounded, and distracted by their moans of agony, I can only think of the scene as a hideous nightmare or liken the place to the ante-chamber of hell itself.

In the morning we were driven out into a yard and paraded for our names to be taken. I gave one at random, I think it was Maxim Cronbach, but it appeared to satisfy the man who interrogated me, and after a question or two, I was ordered back into the ranks of my wretched fellow-prisoners.

But I was not to escape in that way. Just as the order was given for us to file back into the horrible charnel house where we had been herded together, M. Bertloff came into the yard and behind him was Scharkoff, carried on a litter by a couple of men. The men on either side of me understood the meaning of this, and swore viciously when they saw him.

"What does this mean?" I asked the fellow on my right.

"He has turned traitor, the filthy dog, to save his dirty skin. He'll be used to pick out those of us who have taken any leading part in things. I'll have his life for it, if I get out of this."

He proved to be right. The prisoners were led one by one past the litter, and Scharkoff looked carefully at each in turn. In this way a dozen or more were separated from the rest and taken away.

I was one of the last to be led up to the litter, and the moment he saw me his eyes flashed in recognition, and I regretted bitterly the squeamishness which had prevented me from shooting to kill in our last encounter.

"He is Paul Enderby," he said, in as loud a tone as he could command, and it was loud enough to be heard by many of the prisoners, who greeted it with a hoarse yell of rage and hisses.

Bertloff gave a start of surprise and ordered me

to be put on one side, and when the business of identification was over, I was taken into a room where he saw me alone.

"Have you anything to say, Mr. Enderby?" he asked.

"It wouldn't do any good, I suppose."

"Not much, I am afraid. I warned you what would happen if you returned."

"I meant to return all the time."

"Do you know that Mademoiselle Kasslov was also arrested last night?"

"I am bitterly sorry to hear it," I replied, as if it were news to me.

"This is a much more serious business for you than a mere charge of having been among the rioters last night."

"I must put up with that. I took the risk and can face the consequences."

"You will have to stand your trial with the rest who are concerned in the murder of General Kasslov."

"You have probably arrested the real murderer in the crowds taken last night. It is Antonin Gregov."

He shook his head and made no reply.

"I wish, of course, to communicate with the British Consul, and particularly with Mr. Peterson. I am a British subject. Please remember that."

"You shall do so, of course; but I am afraid it will not avail you much. Your share in the matter is provable beyond question. Were you with Mademoiselle Kasslov last night?"

"I would rather not answer any questions until I have seen Mr. Peterson."

"I know you were," he said sharply. "The

man Scharkoff said there was a woman with you, and declares he can recognise her."

"Then why did you try to entrap me into an admission by asking me if I knew of her arrest?"

"Reticence will not do you any good."

"Nor any harm," I retorted. "I am not ashamed of anything I have done."

"What is the meaning of these statements that you betrayed the plans of the Terrorists to us? Have you been with them at all?"

"I cannot answer that." I could not, without betraying the fact that I had not left the city, and this would have injured Grovski.

"We know it," he replied tersely. "But if you gave information to anyone it may help you."

"I am not an informer, M. Bertloff."

"You seem determined to prevent our doing anything for you. However, that must be as you will. One last question. Will you tell me what you were doing in the streets last night armed with a revolver?"

"Those who arrested me found no arms upon me."

"You had a revolver, for you tried to kill the man, Scharkoff."

"I have nothing more to say, at any rate, for the present."

I was taken away then and placed in a cell alone, and felt about as miserable as it was possible for any man to feel when the whole of his hopes lie in ruins about him. There was not one single bright spot in all the gloom. All the efforts I had made on Alma's behalf had resulted only in plunging her into greater trouble than ever.

If only she had been saved, I should not have suffered one tithe as deeply. But through my fault, or misfortune, whichever it were, she was in a far worse case than before. All the suspicions of her connection with the Terrorists would now be confirmed by the circumstances of her arrest, and the fact, evidently known to M. Bertloff, that she and I had actually been in the Terrorist house.

I felt like a madman as I realised that the interpretation which would be put on that fact was that she had flown to them for shelter against her threatened arrest on the abominable charge of murder. And I literally groaned in an anguish of regret that I had intervened to prevent her taking her own life.

Such a death would have been infinitely more merciful than the fate she would now have to face; and the thought of that fate almost unmanned me. As to the result to myself, I scarcely gave it a thought; it seemed so insignificant in comparison with her sufferings. A wild idea came into my head that I might perhaps be able to secure an interview with her and use it to take her life with my own hands and then kill myself.

Later on, Peterson was brought to my cell and the concern in his face told me how black a view he took of the position. I told him fully all that had occurred; and although he tried to conceal the fact, it was clear that he did not entertain the slightest hope of saving either Alma or me.

"You needn't try to hide what you think," I said. "I don't care about myself, although I shan't give in without a fight."

"No, of course not," he said, with the sort of indulgent air one might use to a child. Nothing could help me, was his opinion.

His pessimism irritated me, and even roused my fighting instincts. "There are, at any rate, some things you can do. In the first place, for heaven's sake, get me some of my clothes. I've had enough of rags to last me all my life—all that's left of it, anyhow," I exclaimed, with a bitter laugh.

"I'll see to that, of course."

"Then as to more serious things. The Consul must see to it that no hanky-panky tricks are played with me to drag a confession and force me to admit things."

"They won't try that, Enderby."

"And they mustn't try it with Alma either."

"There's no fear of that. As a matter of fact, enough is already known to make such a thing needless," he replied gloomily.

"Next, you must instruct the ablest lawyer in Moscow to watch Alma's case and another to watch mine. Make all the fight possible, mind, for us both. Then wire a full statement of facts to my father, and urge him to do everything he can with all the friends he can influence. I can trust him to get to work."

"Yes, yes. That's a good step."

"Another thing, find a man named Ivan Buloff, if you can. He was in my employ for a short time lately. See that a thousand pounds are given to him, and that he gets safely to England, or wherever he wishes to go."

"I'll do my best to find him. I give you my word."

"He has earned a lot more than I can tell you. Well, I think that's all. At any rate, it's all I can think of now; so tell me what has been done about clearing Alma from the abominable charge."

He threw up his hands despairingly. "Utter failure, so far I'm as baffled as ever. The doctors have veered round again to Busch's statement to you—that death was due to poison. They are not, however, unanimous; and we can make the most of their differences of course; but the majority declare in favour of poison. On that theory I am bound to say the case is as black as it can be against those who were in the house. Even Madame de Courtennes has been arrested——"

"Yes, I heard that. How did they get hold of her?"

"That's another of the extraordinary points in the matter. She came back of her own free will. I can't understand the woman."

"Why did she go away?"

"She won't tell us," declared Peterson, with a gesture of irritation. "She hasn't said a single syllable in explanation since her return. The police theory is that there was a conspiracy on the part of all concerned; and they base this on some statements they have succeeded in wringing out of that girl, Fedora Douroff. I strongly suspect they used force with her. Her story is that not only Count Kaspar, but all the rest were in it—Mademoiselle Kasslov, Madame de Courtennes, Palutin, and Eikov, and even you. It is said that you were privy to the whole affair, and that that was your

motive in hushing the matter up. As Bertloff told you, you will be charged as an accessory."

"What colossal idiocy! Why do they think we should have procured the arrest of Palutin and the girl herself if we had been in collusion?"

"She explains that by saying there was a quarrel. They searched your office and found Madame de Courtennes' needle syringe, and Fedora identified it, declaring that it had been used for the murder. Bertloff is so certain that there has already been one examination of the prisoners, and there will be another to-morrow or the next day."

"They'll get a conviction, then, you think?" I asked, seeing that that was really his opinion.

"I wish I didn't, Enderby; but it's no sort of good to put the blinkers on your own eyes. I'm not certain about you, but about the rest, yes."

"Well, I'm not. There are too many inconsistencies, and we must hammer away at them until they are driven home. Meanwhile, you must move heaven and earth to get hold of the leader, Antonin Gregov, who took Eikov's place. He is in the city, for I saw him myself. He is pretty sure to be among the prisoners, too, and you must find him. Some of the Kasslov servants will be able to recognise him, and we must manage to secure the necessary delay until that is done. I saw his own written admission—by the way, that letter will have been on Palkavin when he was taken, and Bertloff or Vodolski ought to have it. Make a stir until you get it. It's about our only chance of getting out of all this now."

"I'll do what I can. May I say that you were with the Terrorists, then?"

"You may say anything, if you can only clear Alma from this infernally unjust suspicion. Do all you can, and at once."

The possibility of finding Gregov's letter did something to relieve the gloom of my thoughts after Peterson had left me. If the police had it, I could not bring myself to believe that they would keep it back in order to secure an unjust conviction in support of the theory they had formed.

But the hope proved unfounded. Peterson wrote me a line in the evening to say that no such letter had been found, and that the police were positive Gregov had not been arrested on the previous day. "The arrest of Mademoiselle Kasslov and yourself has hastened matters, I find," he added, "and a further examination of all the prisoners will take place to-morrow. I am sorry to say that none of you will be allowed to be legally represented, and I am afraid you must make up your mind to face the worst."

Racked with thoughts of all the terrible consequences to Alma, I passed a night black with the bitterness of utter despair.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CONDEMNED TO DEATH.

THE following morning found me feverish in body, dejected in mind, and sick at heart. I had not closed my eyes all through the long hours of agony and suspense. I could think of nothing but the horrible fate in store for Alma, and the knowledge that by helping her attempt to escape, I had increased the suspicions against her was like a knife stab in my heart.

Early in the day some of my own clothes were brought, and I was permitted to put them on in place of the peasant's garb I had worn as a disguise in the streets, and soon after I had dressed myself Bertloff came to my cell.

"You are looking ill, Mr. Enderby," he said, not unkindly.

"I don't suppose you are altogether surprised, are you?"

"Matters may not be so bad as you fear. I have come to see. Will you do now what you refused to do yesterday—tell me frankly everything you know and have done in connection with this matter?"

"Will it help Mademoiselle Kasslov?"

"It may help yourself."

"That doesn't worry me. If you will tell me that she will be set at liberty, I'll confess that I myself did the murder. But if you mean to persecute her farther, I'd rather hold my tongue."

"Of course, I cannot give you any such assurance."

"Then while I am very glad to see you to break the monotony of this place, we can't get any farther, M. Bertloff."

"We have very serious evidence, very serious, indeed."

"Is Antonin Gregov a prisoner; and if he is, will you confront me with him?"

"He has not been found among the prisoners yet. There are a great many, and the process of identification will be very lengthy."

"Did you find any papers on Sergius Palkavin?"

"What do you know about Palkavin?"

"If you will tell me what papers you found on him I may answer your question."

"We found none of any importance. Will you tell me of your experience in the house of the Terrorists?"

"No, I cannot."

"Part of the most serious charges against you are on that account, and the Terrorists are very bitter against you."

"I must face the music, and that's all about it. I shall not turn informer."

He continued to question me, but as he had told me that I could not help Alma by speaking, I refused to answer, and in the end he lost his temper and went off, declaring that my silence would tell against me.

In the afternoon I was taken away to another

room in the same building and there I found Alma and Count Kaspar, Madame de Courtennes and Palutin, with a strong force of police in charge of them. Alma was pale and troubled, but very firm. She smiled to me and I tried to get to her, but my guards prevented me.

After a short delay we were led into a court-room and I found a chance to whisper a few words to Alma and to take her hand. But again the guards interfered and we were separated. She was, however, allowed to stand by Madame de Courtennesand during all the proceedings they remained hand in hand.

It was called a trial, but I saw from the outset that the result had been decided against us. The charges were read, conspiracy to murder against us all in common, with the addition that Alma and I were alleged to be members of the revolutionary party.

I had had no experience of criminal procedure in the Russian courts, and I believed that this was merely a preliminary examination. But I was soon undeceived. We were on trial for our lives, and the judge found occasion to explain that the reason for this speedy trial was the turbulent condition of the city.

"Do you mean we are to have no other trial than this?" I burst out indignantly.

But I was ordered to be silent, and the men at my side threatened me if I dared to open my mouth again. "You are lucky not to have been shot without any trial at all," added one of them.

It would not have made much difference, so far as I could see. We were not allowed to say a single word in our defence, not even to put a question to

the witnesses. The whole thing was a grim burlesque, and our guilt was taken for granted by everybody concerned.

And when Fedora gave her testimony, I was not altogether surprised. She had evidently been through a fearful experience in her secret questioning at the hands of the police, and the whole time she was speaking she never looked once in our direction, but kept glancing furtively and nervously at some of the police.

Her story was very much what Peterson had outlined to me. She told it in a low, trembling voice, answering the leading questions put to her with as few words as possible, and she was so confused at times and so contradictory in her statements, that anyone who had not pre-judged the case would have seen she was lying.

She accused us all. Alma, Kaspar, Madame de Courtennes, and I had all been concerned in the conspiracy, she declared, and she had been drawn into it through fear. The murder had long been planned, and in the night it had been committed, we had all been together in the house. I had provided the poison, Madame de Courtennes had shown her the needle syringe with which it was to be done—her own, which I had afterwards taken away from the house; Kaspar and Palkavin had actually done the deed itself, Alma having arranged that they should get to the General's room for the purpose. Eikov had had nothing to do with it, but had been induced to leave the house and provided with money, which Alma had forced her, Fedora, to obtain from the General's bureau. She declared

also that Alma had made a former attempt to poison her father, which she had been successful in preventing.

Five minutes' cross-examination would have sufficed to tear the statement to tatters, but we were not allowed to put a question, and the instant the girl had finished her evidence she was hurried out of the court-room.

My blood boiled at the travesty, until I could restrain myself no longer and burst out into hot, fierce protests, declaring that Fedora's statement was a tissue of lies. They tried to stop me, but I would not be silenced, and at length I was dragged violently out of the court-room by my guards, and taken back to my cell.

I did not hear the end of the trial, therefore, but I had not been there long before they came to tell me that I had been condemned in my absence. The sentences upon Alma and myself had, however, been postponed until the further charges against us—treasonable conspiracy—had been heard.

That trial was to take place at once, and I was accordingly led back to the court-room.

Alma and I were to be tried alone, and although I was burning with indignation at the burlesque justice of which we were the victims, I checked my temper for the sake of being by her side for the last few precious moments. A guard stood by us, but he turned out to be a human beast, and we were allowed to stand side by side and even to whisper to each other.

Her courage was magnificent. She stood facing the judges with head erect and firm, unfaltering

mien, and the only sign of wavering she gave was when I was brought in and placed at her side.

"Oh, that I have brought you to this!" she whispered, as our hands met, but she rallied quickly. "We must not let them believe we are afraid, Paul."

"It is infamous injustice; but it is I who have caused it, Alma."

"I am quite resigned. I was prepared for all that occurred just now in the first trial. M. Bertloff told me that we were certain to be condemned. I think it was kinder than to leave me in suspense. If there were a single hope left alive in me, I am sure I should break down, and there is one mercy for which I am profoundly thankful—now that I am convicted there will be no need for the questioning we dreaded."

"M. Bertloff questioned me this morning and tried to get me to tell him what passed in the Terrorist house. But I would not."

"Nor would I. He came to me also. Except about that, I told him everything clearly—everything I knew about my father's death. But he did not believe me, even when I swore on my hope for everlasting life that you had done no more than I told him."

"How that girl lied about us all. Swearing that I was in the house at the time and that you had before attempted to poison your father."

"It made little difference. They were determined to find us guilty, just as they will of this other charge."

"You are so brave," I said, marvelling at her calmness.

"It is not bravery, Paul, only resignation. I spent most of the night on my knees in prayer for strength. I am but one of many women who have been martyred in the name of justice. I have only one wish now—that we could die together. I feared so much that we should not even meet again. If you could have been saved, I should not have cared."

While we had been speaking, some formal preliminaries had been in progress, but we had been too absorbed in each other to pay much heed to what passed in the court. These were our last moments together and that knowledge drove all else out of our thoughts.

But a moment later there was a stir, and a number of other prisoners were brought into court and ranged up at the back to await their trial. Among them were Palkavin, Pabst, and Manre and more of the leaders whom I had seen in the Terrorist house. On seeing me, they burst out with loud execrations and abuse, reviling me as a traitor, and were only hushed with great difficulty.

After that Scharkoff was carried in to give evidence of my association with the Terrorists. He proved that I had taken the oath of obedience, declaring I had taken it voluntarily and had been appointed to assassinate Vodolski. But it came out that it was he who had given the information which had led to the raid on the house and the arrests.

I was not sorry to have the belief in my treachery destroyed in this way, and I noticed a marked difference in the looks of Palkavin and his companions.

Scharkoff appeared to glory in the part he had played, indeed, and when he declared that he had

been in communication with the police throughout, the rage of the men behind was so furious that they attempted to attack him on the spot and were only restrained by the strong body of men surrounding them.

Bertloff followed and showed himself to be bitterly incensed against me. He declared that there was no doubt I had long been closely associated with the Terrorists; I had found the money with which the man who was at first believed to have assassinated General Kasslov, Eskatoff, had been able to escape; I had been on friendly terms with many of them, Gortoff and others, and had constantly met them and given them information, and so on.

Growing more and more vehement as he proceeded, he referred to my oath as a willing act and denounced my refusal to admit that I had been in the Terrorist house as if it had been an additional crime. "He could have given me the most valuable information, had he pleased," he cried fiercely. "Why did he refuse? I offered him his freedom if he would tell me what passed in that house, but not one syllable would he disclose. He protested that he was bound to silence by his honour. Honour!" he repeated with angry scorn. "What sense of honour can such a man possess? Obstinacy, treachery, sullenness, these if you like closed his lips, but honour!"

He appeared to lash himself into a fury with his own words and pointing with a hand which literally trembled with passion, he cried: "He is a more dangerous man to the State than the most hardened of the Terrorist leaders. He has used his nationality as a cloak for this conspiracy. His wealth enabled

him to suborn one of our most trusted agents, and when we sought to deport him, he induced that man to connive at allowing him to remain in the city in order that he might join his comrades in this blackest of work. He was made the depositary of their secrets, and undertook to assassinate no other than his Excellency, Baron Vodolski. I speak of what I know," he exclaimed, in ringing tones of denunciation, " and he sought to force the man he had bribed to help his villanous purpose with information about his intended victim. His infamy failed, thanks be to heaven, and his villany recoiled on his own head, and for the last few days he has been hunted by the very men—they stand there," he broke off with a dramatic gesture at Palkavin and the rest—" some of whom have denounced him to us. But this I declare, if any one of them deserves death, this man before you, Terrorist, briber, and would-be assassin, merits it far more than they. And that penalty I claim."

Both Alma and I listened to this infuriated harangue in amazement, and saw its effect upon the judges. Grovski came next and described how I had bribed him that I might remain in Moscow—to have time to assassinate Vodolski—as he declared. When he asserted that for the same purpose I had gone to him afterwards seeking information about Vodolski's movements, there was no longer room to doubt what the end would be.

It came almost immediately, after a very few words from the presiding judge. He described me as one of the most dangerous Terrorists who had ever been caught red-handed, and Alma as but little

better, and declared that our obstinate refusal to disclose facts which must be in our possession, added to the heinousness of our offence. With that grim preface he sentenced us both to death.

As he ceased there was a commotion behind us and Palkavin broke from his guards and rushed toward us as we were leaving the court.

"God be with you, Mr. Enderby!" he cried, seizing my hand. "We have wronged you bitterly. These butchers are murdering you, but your death shall be avenged I swear——"

He had no time to say more, for the police dragged him away and silenced him. I should have been rejoiced at the incident but for the fact that Alma had been hurried away while he detained me, and thus the opportunity for a last word of farewell was lost.

I was taken back to the same cell.

"When will it be?" I asked one of the fellows who guarded me.

"Soon enough to satisfy your impatience. To-morrow, I expect. We have plenty of the same work. You won't feel lonely," and he laughed like the brute he was.

I was too overcome to feel his jibe. "I wish to see a friend," I said.

"You'll find plenty of them on the shooting ground," and with this he went away.

I was now treated as a man under sentence of death. I was searched in order that they might be sure that I had not the means of taking my own life; I was heavily ironed, a guard remained in the cell with me, and all through the awful hours of that night I was not left alone.

It was of Alma I thought. The bitterest agony of all was the knowledge that we were not to meet again and that she was passing through torments as heartscarching and cruelly unmerited as I myself.

I asked that Peterson should be allowed to see me that evening, but the hours dragged their length along and he did not come. My one forlorn hope was that he would still be able to make some effort to save Alma from the foul injustice of her sentence. When the guard in my cell was changed at midnight —one morose, sullen brute taking the place of the other—I gave up hope of seeing even him.

Soon after that, the alternating emotions of the day following upon the previous night of sleepless suspense and harrowing anxiety told upon me. I was utterly worn out, and sleep mercifully rendered me oblivious to my position.

I was awakened by my guard who told me to eat the breakfast which had been brought to the cell while I slept. I had little appetite, as may be imagined, but I was not going to show the despair I really felt.

Sleep refreshed and strengthened me, and when, about an hour afterwards, men came and took off my leg irons and bade me follow them, I pulled myself together, resolved to face death calmly.

At that moment it was not fear that I felt, only a consuming reluctance to die and an overwhelming regret that I should never see Alma again.

I followed my gaolers with head held high and with a firm bearing and step, in merciful ignorance of the further terrible ordeal which I had yet to endure.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE PREFACE TO DEATH.

I WAS not to face the guns of the platoon at once. In the centre of the prison there was a many-sided hall out of which the heavy iron doors of the various corridors of the place opened, and along one end ran a series of stone arches, forming a kind of cloister.

In this hall a number of prisoners were gathered, and as I entered my guards pushed me forward and left me.

There were perhaps a score of such prisoners, and I scanned them eagerly in the hope that I should find Alma amongst them. But she was not there, and with a very heavy heart I began to pace up and down the place, waiting to be led out to die.

I judged from the conduct of those around me that, like myself, they were all under sentence of death. Some were utterly dejected, crouching on the floor, white of face and hollow of eye, a prey to that absorbing fear of death which will at times strike even the strongest of us. Others, equally afraid, sought to hide it under an assumption of bravado and swagger which cannot have deceived themselves and certainly did not mislead the rest.

They were speaking in loud boastful tones, telling anecdotes of what they had done, and mingling the relation with ribald jests and noisy laughter.

Others, again, felt the solemnity of the moment and were on their knees praying to a God whom they had remembered with austere unction after long neglect. And apart from the rest were two or three pacing the floor thoughtfully, and, like myself, possibly hoping that the end would not be delayed long enough to destroy the semblance of calm and resignation.

As I passed one of these men, he looked up, and we both gave a start of mutual recognition. It was Eskatoff, the young fellow who had been told off to assassinate General Kasslov and had brought the news of his death to the Russie that night. He knew me by name and that I had furnished the money for his escape. He told me he had returned to Moscow to take part in the rising, had been caught fighting in the streets on the previous day, tried at once, and sentenced to be shot that morning.

"Your presence here tells me you are also condemned," he added. "I have heard much of you. You were suspected of having betrayed our leaders. I am glad it was proved to be false."

"It doesn't seem to matter much. The end is the same," I replied.

"We fought and lost, and must pay the penalty," he said philosophically. "I would rather have lived. I am no fool or braggart, like those fellows there. I risked my life knowing what I did, and I hope I shall be able to die as a man should."

"But there is an act of justice you can do before

you die. Tell the truth about the death of General Kasslov. His daughter and others have been wrongfully condemned for the murder and are to suffer death. You can clear them. You will do this? It cannot harm you if you are to die," I urged, with mounting excitement at the hope of even yet being able to save Alma.

He paused to think. "I can tell it now, but at first my lips were closed by the orders of Antonin Gregov."

"You were present at the time?" I asked almost breathlessly.

"I did not know then that Gregov had decided to do the deed himself. I was chosen for the task by the leaders in the city, and had succeeded in finding a means to enter the house with absolute secrecy. I had a woman accomplice, I won't tell you whom. I reached the room where I knew I should find the General. Dr. Busch had told me all I needed to know. He was with me in it all, because of the foul murder of his dear friend, Countess Nomanoff. But when I got there, I surprised Gregov doing the very work I had gone to do. I was within an ace of death at his hands, for, like a flash, his revolver was at my head. But I told him my purpose and satisfied him. Instead of shooting me, he bade me help him, and commanded me to take the credit for the deed until such time as he chose to avow it openly as his own work. I got him from the house by the way I knew, and then returned to the Russie with the news, claiming for myself the honour of the deed, as he had commanded me. He has since avowed it openly, and thus my lips are unsealed."

"You will declare this to the police here?"

"Of what use? They would not take my word," he said calmly.

But I was far from calm. Here was the testimony that would clear Alma, and I rushed in turn from one to another of the many doors and beat upon them with my gyved hands to attract attention. I might as well have beaten upon the face of the city walls, for all the response that came.

The rest watched me as if I had suddenly lost my senses in fright, and jeers and mockery were showered upon me from all sides. I heeded nothing. Alma's life hung on my success, and I continued my efforts ceaselessly.

After a time one of the doors at the far end from me was opened, some guards entered and three names were called. The last was Eskatoff's. I dashed across to the guards, and in impassioned tones told them what I had heard, asking, demanding, and at last begging them to fetch M. Bertloff.

The only reply was a stern command to stand aside, and when I continued my importunities, I was thrust violently away. Then the first of the three was led out to execution.

At this I redoubled my cries, and I was seized and held forcibly.

Then came the sound of the guns, and my brain whirled at the thought that in another minute or two at most Eskatoff himself would be led off, and the chance of saving Alma would be gone for ever.

As the second man was taken out, a door behind me opened and Bertloff himself entered, and to my horror, I saw Alma among half-a-dozen fresh prisoners who followed behind him.

I broke away from the guards who held me and rushed to him, passing even Alma herself in my desperate haste, and poured out the truth as I now knew it, urging him in the name of heaven to delay Eskatoff's execution until his statement could be taken.

At that moment came the second report of the guns. It was now a matter of no more than seconds, but Bertloff would not even answer me. With a face as black as a thunder cloud, he ordered the guards beside him to take me away, and just as Alma reached my side, the short command rang out, and Eskatoff himself was led away.

I dashed my hands to my face in a frenzy of impotent rage and such suffering as well nigh turned my brain. In a voice broken with emotion, I repeated to Alma what Eskatoff had told me.

"It is heaven's will, Paul," she answered with sublime composure. "I am resigned to it," and she besought me to be calm.

"I cannot. I cannot, my God, I cannot, when I think of this monstrous wrong to you. My brain is on fire. If he had but yielded, your life would have been saved. Not heaven's will this, but man's infernal brutality," and with loathing in my eyes and murder in my heart, I looked round at Bertloff where he stood in the midst of his men. I was a murderer then in thought and intent, and could I but have reached him, I would have had his life for hers.

She saw the look and cried out. "Oh, Paul! Paul! For God's sake, dearest! Come aside, where we can speak together for our last few minutes."

She drew me away far from Bertloff, as if fearing I should make the desperate attempt which she could read in my face. "Remember this, dearest, I would rather die now that they tell me you are to die. Do you think I would care to live? If so, you little know a woman's heart."

She was not gyved as were the rest of us, and she put her arms round my neck and kissed me, caring nought for the looks or thoughts of others in that one supreme moment.

"I marvel at your calmness, but I cannot share it," I cried.

"There is no cause for marvel. What would life be to me without you? I have but one regret—that we did not die together when the chance offered in that terrible house. You would have been spared all these terrors on my account. I know it is for me you suffer, but ah, my dearest, it is so much better. Death is so small a suffering compared to life without you."

And in this way, clinging tenderly to me the while, and pressing her lips again and again to mine, she sought to ease the burden of my despair and calm the stress of my impotent anger. Gradually the strength of her sweet compassion won upon me, and, seeing how my wildness troubled her, I put restraint upon myself and forced at least an outward semblance of calmness.

I observed then that some of the other prisoners were watching us closely, holding carefully aloof as if the fact of our love, now seen by all, rendered our case even more desperate than their own.

And all the time the grim roll-call of death was

being steadily called, and prisoner after prisoner was taken out to face the guns, whose sharp reports rang out with monotonous regularity, announcing the payment of the last penalty which the outraged Government could exact.

The number in the room was thinning rapidly, and I knew that our turn would come soon. I had not noticed this in the absorption of my anger, but we both saw it now with a shuddering catch of the breath. We had only a few minutes more together on earth.

Then we perceived another thing which had hitherto passed unobserved by either of us. In order to further break down the nerves of the doomed men and women, the bodies of the dead were brought back and carried on litters under the row of dismal arches at the end of the room. It was a touch of genuine Russian ingenuity, and at the sight of the first still-covered form thus borne slowly past, Alma shrank closer to me and hid her face on my shoulder.

"Oh God!" she moaned under her breath. "I hope they will be merciful and take me first. It will break me down unless."

At that moment Palkavin crossed to us. "Forgive me if I intrude thus upon such sorrow as yours, but my time is now all but finished, and there is something I must say to you."

I glanced at him. With Alma thus overcome, I could not frame any words.

"We wronged you by our suspicions, Mr. Enderby. You die like us for the cause, acquitted of all shadow of suspicion. Will you forgive me and take my hand? With all my heart I grieve for you both."

I made no reply, but gave him my hand; and Manre and Pabst followed him and grasped it also.

"Only one word more. We have sent word out to our followers that you are no traitor, but a true man. And now, God give you strength, mademoiselle," he said fervently, a break in his voice as he turned away.

Bertloff, who had been lurking behind a pillar within sound of the voices, came out, a leer of triumph on his face and the light of anger in his eyes.

"I knew it," he said as he passed me, his voice reaching the other three, who turned to look at him. "I needed only this proof." Then he signalled to those on the other side and Alma's name was called, and then mine.

I felt every muscle in her body stiffen as she clung to me, and a dry sob of agony rent her.

"Good-bye, my dearest!" I whispered, as I pressed my lips to hers and strained her to me in a last passionate, despairing embrace.

With splendid courage she rallied her strength and stood erect. "I am ready now," she said in a firm voice.

We crossed the room together, and my heart seemed to be torn in two as she left my side and took her place in the fatal line. I held her hand to the last moment, and when her turn came to go, I begged the guards to let me go and die with her. But they would not.

At last the order came, short, stern, and oh, so horribly cruel.

She walked with a firm step between the men guarding her and I kept my eyes upon her to the

last, last moment, until she turned and smiled back to me with the undaunted courage of a martyr.

And then she was gone!

In one way it helped me. I thanked heaven that my turn was to come next.

Then the doors from another part of the prison were opened again, and another batch of prisoners were brought in. I was waiting for the signal that was to announce my turn, and was ready and indeed eager to go, when in a second all my former fury once more awoke.

Among the prisoners was Antonin Gregov. Bertloff stopped him to put some questions.

In a second I had broken from my guards and ran to them. Even now there was time to stay the murder of Alma, if only this human brute would use his power.

"That is the murderer of General Kasslov," I cried to Bertloff in a ringing voice, pointing to Gregov. "Stop the butchery of the innocent girl you have just sent to her death for the crime that man committed. Palkavin, you know——" I cried, calling to him.

But at a sign from Bertloff I was seized and silenced.

And then came the sound of the guns which announced that it was too late.

Oh God! Too late!

I clapped my manacled hands to my head in such anguish as no words can tell.

But a whirlwind frenzy of passion seized once more upon me, maddening me and filling me with a wild, insensate, uncontrollable lust to take the life

of the man who had wrought this wrong of wrongs and sent to her unmerited death the woman I loved.

I looked round me stealthily for the chance I sought, and even as I looked I saw passing along the dim arches at the end the procession of guards bearing Alma's body.

With a loud cry I sprang toward Bertloff to take him by the throat and tear the life out of him.

But I was stopped. He had been watching me closely, as if reading the murderous thought in my heart, and on the instant his men had closed with me. Fury gave me the strength of many men, but I could not prevail in such a contest.

I was overborne and should have been done to death on the spot, if he himself had not intervened and stopped the violence.

Then followed the order for me to go.

"Let me at least die like a man," I called to him, for his men were dragging me out, as one would drag a dog to a pond. He had gone ahead intending, I concluded, to feast his eyes upon my death.

He gave the order, and his fellows released their hold of me. Then, summoning all my nerve and fixing my mind steadfastly on the consoling thought that I was going to Alma, I walked steadily and firmly in the midst of my guards.

It was not hard to die. Now that Alma had gone even the reluctance I had before felt left me, and I was ready to meet, and even to welcome, the release.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE END.

WHEN the door closed behind the men who were leading me to the place of execution, they marched me along a stone corridor for some twenty yards and were then called to halt. Irons were again fastened on my legs, and my hands were manacled behind my back instead of in front.

I was then as helpless as a new-born babe.

My guards were changed. The four who had brought me returned and two others took their places. By these I was put into a cell close at hand, fastened by my irons against the wall, and then left alone for some minutes.

Presently Bertloff entered, and on the instant all my rage against him flamed up in its former fury.

He raised his hand in protest. "You yourself have made this last step necessary, Mr. Enderby. I have to speak to you alone and do not mean you to take my life. Will you give me your word of honour not to attack me if I set you free? "

"No," I answered bluntly. "You are a murderer. You sent an innocent girl to her death when a word from you could have saved her. I have no wish

now to live, and if I stood unfettered in your presence I would not answer for myself."

He smiled, and the smile so infuriated me that I tore at my fetters in a mad, futile effort to spring at him.

He raised his hand again. "I am not smiling at tragedy, but because I have carried out my orders well enough to mislead even you. Mademoiselle Kasslov is not dead."

"You lie!" I cried passionately. "I heard the guns of the murderers and saw her dead body carried back by your men."

"It was not her body, but that of another convict."

At that moment the report of musketry interrupted him.

"You hear that?" he asked. "Those shots are believed to have killed you, and a body, intended to be mistaken for yours, will be borne in a minute or two through the central hall. Even my own men believe you both have perished."

A passion of joy swept over me, as wild and overpowering as my former rage. "Do you pledge your oath that she still lives?" I cried, breathlessly.

"Freely, and more gladly than you appear to think possible. I am not your enemy, nor hers. Now, will you give me your word not to attempt violence and to do exactly as I tell you? It is for both your sakes."

I laughed hysterically and then all but burst into tears. "Of course I will. My oath if you wish." I was in a whirl of amazement, the dominant note of which was the ecstatic consciousness that Alma was living, and that we should meet again.

Eskatoff turned aside, took some clothes from a large handbag he was carrying, and releasing me, told me to put them on. It was a police uniform, and when I had it on, he handed me a false wig and beard as black as my own hair was light.

"You will follow, as if in attendance upon me," he said, and led the way to a room in a distant part of the building.

"Where is Mademoiselle Kasslov?" I asked, the instant the door was shut. The interval had enabled me to regain my self-command.

He smiled. "Would you have me do my work so clumsily as to shut her in my private office? You must have patience."

"She is more to me than my life."

"I give you my word that all is as well with her as with you."

"Then tell me what it all means."

He pushed a box of cigars across to me, and I lit one with the delight of a man who had not tasted tobacco for days.

"I received orders to save your life. You heard yesterday that all you have done during the past weeks is known to us, the fact that you supplied the money with which Eskatoff at first escaped, that afterwards the Terrorists forced you to take their oath, that you were ordered to assassinate Baron Vodolski, that you agreed to do it, and that instead you made your escape from them."

"But in the court you——"

"Patience, please. I had to save your life. These men believed you had betrayed them, and had such a belief remained, you would have been hunted to

the ends of the world if necessary, and murdered. That was the meaning of that trial. You must not think our methods are so crude and drastic as they appeared to you then. I had the leaders into the court to hear your trial, and my denunciation of you and demand for your death was for their hearing. For the same reason the spy, Scharkoff, was driven to admit that he had betrayed the house. Your death sentence followed, as a matter of course; and you were taken to the central hall this morning and placed with the Terrorists in order that I might satisfy myself they were convinced you had not betrayed them, and that you had really been put to death."

"It was realistic enough," I said, with a grim smile.

"It had to be. I knew the men I was dealing with. I dared not give you a hint, for a single false step on your part might have ruined everything. And it is not yet finished. Those three leaders will be put back for a few days that they may send word to their followers that Paul Enderby is dead, a martyr in their cause."

"And what is to be done with me?"

"You will leave for St. Petersburgh secretly to-night as a police agent on special duty. You will go this time," he added drily, "for Mademoiselle Kasslov will be on the same train. But you must not travel together."

"How shall I know that she is there?"

"You shall see her; but must not speak to her. It is not safe."

"And after?"

"That is no concern of mine. My part will be over, thank heaven. You have given me a vast amount of trouble and thought."

"There are a thousand questions I wish to ask. Tell me——"

"I have orders not to tell you any more, but you may gather that very powerful influences indeed have been at work on your behalf."

"Do you mean the British Consul or my father's friends?"

"I am not at liberty to tell you what that influence is. You will remain in the adjoining room until it is time for you to start. You will hold no communication with anyone; if you consult your safety, indeed, you will leave everyone here to accept the story of your death—at any rate for a time. You will be the police agent, Martin, and someone will come to the train for you at Petersburgh."

He opened the door of the adjoining room. "But there is one thing you must tell me," I said quickly. "About the murder of General Kasslov."

"I can only tell you that the truth is now fully known," and with that meagre announcement he left me. He brought me some food with his own hands during the day, and himself took me to the station in the evening.

On the way I asked him to give a message to Peterson to do all I had told him as to rewarding Eikov.

"It shall have all the solemnity of a dying request," replied Bertloff with a grin.

He kept his word in regard to Alma. I saw her.

She was dressed in the garb of a sister of charity, and he assured me she knew I was travelling on the same train. I thought indeed I caught a glance from her in my direction.

With that I had to be satisfied. It was all very mysterious and profoundly perplexing; but Bertloff's manner had so reassured me that I tumbled into my sleeping berth and did not awake until we were close to the capital, and heard someone asking for the police agent, Martin.

He was obviously a member of the secret police, and about as communicative as an Egyptian mummy. He drove with me to a large house, and as soon as he had installed me in a room where a breakfast was spread for me, he went out, saying he would announce my arrival.

I was left alone for some two or three hours. I breakfasted heartily, smoked cigar after cigar from a box very thoughtfully provided, and passed the time thinking of Alma, where she was, and what had chanced to her, and when we should meet. I could only speculate vaguely as to what the next turn of Fortune's wheel would bring me; and whose powerful influence my father had succeeded in enlisting in my behalf.

At the end of the time a young, well-dressed man entered and asked me to go with him. I followed him across the wide hall to a door opposite.

"His Excellency will see you here," he announced, as if I ought to know quite well whom I was to see. And he drew aside for me to enter.

"His Excellency" was sitting at a writing table, expecting me; and when I saw him I caught my

and literally staggered backward in unfeigned surprise.

It was face to face with the dead!

It was Alma's father, General Kasslov, himself! His eagle eyes ran quickly over me, noting my infinite amazement, and for a passing second the phantom of a smile drew down the corners of his hard, straight mouth—a smile of self-satisfaction, not of might. Then he motioned me to a chair.

I dropped into it, dazed and wonder-filled, and stared at him, fatuously.

"Collect youself, Mr. Enderby. Our interview will be short. As you may conclude, I do not meet you with any pleasure."

It was certainly the General. No other man would have spoken in such a way at that crisis. "Do I owe my life and everything to you?" I stammered. "I am in a maze."

He waved a hand impatiently. "I had to use you. That is all. Do you still wish to marry my daughter?"

"With all my——"

"Are you willing to marry her without a penny of fortune?" he broke in again impatiently. "Will you do it to-day and leave Russia with her at once, and pledge your word never to return? I have obtained his Majesty's consent. But you understand, her fortune will be mine. Take time to think."

"I need no time. I consent only too gladly."

"That is all then"; and he rose.

"But I am bewildered at seeing you. I must ask——"

He turned on me like a flash of lightning. "Do you mean you decline?"

"Good heavens, no!" I exclaimed.

"Then come with me."

He led me into an adjoining room, where there were some half-dozen people. Alma and a priest stood in the centre.

She ran to me and we clasped hands, gazing into each other's eyes, too ecstatically happy and emotional for words, and we stood thus while the strange ceremony was performed, and we were made man and wife.

As soon as it was over and Alma, all sweet blushes, was in my arms, her father sent the others out of the room.

"You will start at once," he announced curtly; "and will travel to the frontier dressed as you are. The carriage is at the door. Here are your papers."

I was prepared for anything by this time.

Alma ran to throw her arms round him, and I followed to thank him.

But he repulsed us both. "I do this because it suits me, not because I care what becomes of you," he said to Alma. And to me: "We have never been friends, and I have no wish ever to see you again."

That was his farewell to us. But I had Alma now, and nothing else counted.

On the train, as soon as we were able to think of other things than the prodigious happiness which had come to us so suddenly and so wondrously, I asked Alma if she could explain the miracle. Her father had been much more communicative to her than to me, and she told me.

"My father knew from the first that the servant, who called himself Eikov, was in reality the Terrorist leader Antonin Gregov; and that he had come to the house for one purpose—assassination. He then formed the scheme which he has since carried out successfully—to kill Gregov and personate him, taking his place as the head of the Terrorists, in order to get at their innermost secrets and capture all the leaders in one sweep of the net, and thus achieve the crowning triumph of his life."

"Rendered possible, of course, because Gregov was personally known to so few," I said, astounded by this proof of the courage of the grim old man. "Then who was the man the crowd hailed as Antonin Gregov that day at the head of the procession, and whom I saw again in the prison yesterday morning?"

"Only one of the leaders of course. It was the kernel of my father's plan that no one who had ever known the real Gregov should be at liberty."

"Tell me," I cried eagerly.

"While Gregov was in the house, my father watched him like a lynx, and possessed himself of his papers, and so learnt his secrets. We all thought he was ill, you remember, but that was only a cover for his plans. He knew that that night had been appointed for the assassination, and waited almost until the very hour fixed. That quarrel with me was a part of the scheme, and his declaration that he himself would go out and see that you were sent away from the city was made only to account for the body being found in uniform. He had arranged to see Palutin that night, intending that suspicion

should fall on him. Palutin did not leave until close to the time when my father knew Gregov meant to act, and he sent at once for Gregov, pretending to give him an easy opportunity for the murder. Gregov walked unsuspectingly into the trap. My father had a chair, the arms of which closed with secret springs upon anyone sitting in it; and he pushed Gregov into this. The man was held as in a vice; and it was easy enough then for my father to inject the poison by means of the hypodermic syringe which he had taken from Madame de Courtennes' room. Then he stripped the dead body and dressed it in uniform, so that it might the more readily be mistaken for him. The mutilation followed as a part of the plan. He stabbed and hacked the body to hide the real cause of death, and then slashed and battered the features to make recognition of them impossible, and plunged Gregov's own dagger into the heart with the Terrorist message upon it."

"What deliberation and what courage!" I cried, almost fascinated by the description of the General's unbridled daring.

"Everything was just completed when Eskatoff arrived, and my father used him to spread the first false story of the murder. He fled to St. Petersburgh and his first act was to cause the arrest of every Terrorist who knew Gregov by sight. Then he took command of all their plans, choosing Palkavin, Manre, and Pabst as his intermediaries. Gradually he spread the net round every known leader; he himself organised the rising in Moscow; he sent the guns to be stored in the depôts he named, and

at the crisis chose the moment and the means to shatter the whole movement at a stroke."

"Did he know of your danger and of the suspicions against you?"

"Everything, even of our attempt to escape. We were to have been allowed to go, but Palkavin acted contrary to his orders and seized me a few hours too soon. All the suspicions against us and others helped to conceal the truth, but of course we were never in the danger we feared. Your name was given to the Terrorists and you were appointed to assassinate Baron Vodolski, because he knew you would never consent to do it, and that no other man would be appointed and so time gained. But he did not really intend that either you or I should fall into their hands; and it was when he knew of it that he began to let the Moscow people into the secret, and ordered the raid on the house where we were. Had we remained there, we should have been safe. But the fact that he had to use you and that you ran such risks for me led to his ultimately deciding upon our marriage."

Together with his desire to get Alma's fortune, was my thought, but I kept that to myself. "He was right enough when he said he had to use me," I said drily. "It might easily have had a very different ending."

"Thank heaven it had not!" cried Alma fervently. "But if it had not all happened, I should never have been your wife. My father is in such favour as the successful result of his scheme, that the Emperor will deny him nothing."

"Well, I will call the account more than square.

We owe him some days of truly awful suspense, but I also owe him—my wife and the years of happiness which that means"; and I gathered her once again in my arms.

We continued to discuss the affair all the way to the frontier; and there we had another if smaller surprise. Madame de Courtennes was awaiting us.

The greetings between us all were of the warmest, and as soon as the chance came, I fired off the question which had so often puzzled me—why she had fled from Moscow in that mysterious fashion?

"Have you never guessed? I marvel," she said. "It was because I knew that if I were questioned I could not deny that Alma had poison in her possession. I had seen it, and I fled rather than admit what I knew would add to her danger."

"But Alma had seen some in your possession also."

"That was Kaspar's doing," said Alma. "He used Fedora. Mr. Peterson was right that together they had concocted a plan to poison both my father and me. They will pay a heavy price for it—Siberia."

"Serve them right, too," I cried indignantly. "Thank God, the scheme failed. But you, madame, why did you return?"

"I was stopped on the frontier and have been in prison ever since."

"My father told me that," said Alma. "He was afraid to let madame be at liberty lest any suspicion of the truth should leak out before his plans were completed."

"Well, I, for one, have had enough of Russia to last me my life!" I exclaimed.

"Amen to that, with all my heart and soul!" cried Madame de Courtennes.

"And you, Alma?"

She paused a moment, glanced back across the frontier to the land of her birth, then turned, looked lovingly into my eyes, and placed her hand in mine. "I am going to my new home, Paul."

Tears were glistening in her eyes. "Please God, you shall never have cause to shed those in earnest, dearest," I whispered.

"But I hope to," she cried; and the sunshine of a smile broke through them. "They are tears of gratitude, happiness, and hope."

"Then you may cry your eyes out with such tears."

We all three laughed lightly and happily, and then had to hurry to the train in obedience to the raucous call of the officials.

THE END.

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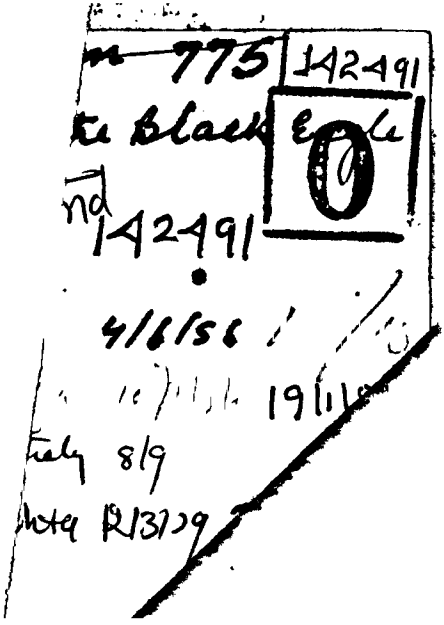

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